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The Best
One-Act Plays
of
1946—47

Selected by
J. W. MARRIOTT
Editor of "One-Act Plays of To-day"
"Great Modern British Plays" etc.
Author of "The Theatre" etc.



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Foreword

WITH the exception of Ian Hay's *The Fourpenny Box*, all the plays in this volume were discovered in the manuscript stage of their existence, although two or three have subsequently appeared in the printed form. Mr T. B. Morris's ambitious play, dedicated to the people of Coventry, was performed by an anonymous cast in the ruins of the cathedral in 1944, but it was not printed until the end of 1947. Several plays have won prizes in drama festivals in various parts of the country. Five of the writers make their first appearance in this series, which began in 1931.

The present collection contains serious drama, including tragedy, as did its predecessor; but this time there is a larger proportion of light or farcical comedy, and there are examples of fantasy or near-fantasy which seem to have significance in the world to-day.

The professional theatre is flourishing in many of our big cities, and the London theatre is by no means confined to the West End. Little theatres have sprung up in unexpected places and provided opportunities for the performance of plays by new writers. Nevertheless the dearth of promising new playwrights is disquieting. The explanation is not so much that the ability to make plays is diminishing as that young authors look to the films, where the rewards are apt to be more substantial and more immediate. Theatrical managers, too, are timid about taking risks with a newcomer; they prefer to import successes from America or to revive old favourites.

But writers of one-act plays appear to be as numerous as ever, and the difficulty about editing a collection like the following lies in the selection of the best from the mass of

material available—the finding of plays by authors who have imagination, the ability to construct, to write dramatic dialogue, and to create characters which have a life of their own. At the same time it is necessary to provide examples of various types of play to meet the differing requirements of the amateur stage.

The one-act play is by no means an easy form of art. To suppose that it demands only one-third of the ability needed for a full-length play is too naive to be seriously controverted.

J. W. M.

Acknowledgments

THE compiler desires to express his thanks to the following authors and publisher for permission given to print the plays in this volume:

The authors of *Jenny in the Orchard*, *Space Ship One*, *Outcast*, *Alison's Island*, *Liberation*, *I will Arise!*; the authors and Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, for *The Fourpenny Box*, *Mr Twemlow is not Himself*, *Down to the Seas*, and *When the Old Cock Crows*.

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The Fourpenny Box

By Ian Hay

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CHARACTERS

(As they appear)

JANIE BIRD !

DR BLAIN

THE REV. ARTHUR VELLACOTT

ANN VELLACOTT

ADAM BAXTER

MRS CADDICK

DORIS JENKINS

ADA BONE

CORPORAL TANNER

PETER CROFT

MR PETTIGREW

MR MOULD

*The scene is laid in Adam Baxter's little house,
The Green, Broxborough.*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It is important that the minor characters in this play should keep the action brisk. They have to stand about a great deal with very little to do. They should maintain an appearance of animation throughout, conversing, inventing bits of business, and generally sustaining the party atmosphere—without, of course, distracting the attention of the audience from the principals.

Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New York

The Fourpenny Box

The scene represents the interior of a quite humble home. The furniture is good, but old-fashioned because it was inherited. Up-stage right is a door leading to a lobby or small hall, in which a hat-and-coat stand can be seen.

At the back, left-centre, a door leads to a bedroom and the kitchen, etc. Between these doors is a mahogany bookcase with glass doors. All the books in it are bound in brown paper, and numbered.

The windows are on the right. At the right wall is a desk with a swivel-chair. Another chair is set above the desk against the wall. At right-centre are a small table and two chairs. At left-centre a sofa, and a stool below and to the right of it.

The fireplace is in the left wall. There is a small armchair below it, and another chair above it. Above the fireplace is another table with a tray of glasses and one or two bottles of lemon-squash, or other fruit drinks. There are two other chairs set against the wall up left.

It is about seven o'clock on a Saturday evening in April.

The door up-stage left-centre opens, and Janie Bird, Baxter's grand-daughter, enters briskly, carrying a jug. She is about nineteen or twenty. She puts the jug down on the table left, then brings two chairs down from up-stage and sets them at the table, whistling cheerfully.

The knocker sounds off right. Janie goes out right, and is heard opening and shutting the outer door. She returns, followed by Arthur Blain, a young country doctor.

JANIE. Walk right into the Baxter parlour, Doctor. Wipe your feet first, and give me your hat.

[She hangs his hat on the hat-stand.]

BLAIN. Thank you. [*He follows her into the parlour.*] So this is the home of the Oracle.

JANIE. Yes, and I've brought you here on false pretences. The Oracle's out. Can you wait?

BLAIN. I believe that's quite usual, where Oracles are concerned!

JANIE. Then sit down by the fire, while I do a bit of tidying up. We're expecting company presently.

BLAIN. Can't I help?

JANIE. Yes, you can pull that old sofa more into the middle of the room.

BLAIN [*having done so*]. Now?

JANIE. You can sit on it. [*He does so meekly. She lays out some ash-trays on the table right-centre.*] Who told you he was called the Oracle?

BLAIN [*sitting on the sofa*]. Mr Timpenny, the bookseller. He says Mr Baxter is the recognized authority here on all matters literary, scientific, and historical.

JANIE. That's right. [*Tidying the desk right*] And in all matters common-sensical he's an authority that can't be recognized by anybody. Here's him been in bed all day, with one of his legs—

BLAIN [*facetiously*]. Where was the other one?

JANIE [*quite seriously, returning below the table right-centre*]. Oh, it was there too, but only one was bad. That was why I left a message at your house asking you to come round. And while my back's turned, what does he do? Slips out on me! And I bet I know where he is at this minute. Outside Timpenny's bookshop, messing about in the four-penny box!

BLAIN. I believe I saw him there as I came down High Street.

JANIE. Do you know him?

BLAIN: Of course. He was pointed out to me as a local celebrity almost as soon as I settled in Broxborough.

JANIE [*thoughtfully*]. You took over old Dr Wiseman's practice, didn't you?

BLAIN. Yes.

JANIE. He was our doctor. Well, he was more of a friend than a doctor really. Hardly charged us anything at all. Nothing, practically.

BLAIN [*smiling*]. I see. But isn't Mr Baxter taken care of under the new Act? National Health Scheme, and so on?

JANIE [*turning up right-centre*]. No, nothing of that kind! He's a gentleman. He has a library. Look! [*She indicates the bookcase.*] Some of that was left to him by the late Archdeacon.

BLAIN. Who was the late Archdeacon?

JANIE. Before my time. But you'll hear all about him from Grandfather when he comes in. Talking of that, it's time he *was* in. I'm going out to collect him. [*She goes into the vestibule right, and takes her hat from the hat-stand.*] Make yourself at home.

BLAIN. Right. May I read a book out of the library while you're away?

JANIE [*emphatically*]. No, you may not. [*She comes back into the room and crosses left.*] But you can have a glass of lemon-squash if you like.

[*She pours one out and brings it down to him.*]

BLAIN [*meekly*]. Thank you.

JANIE. You're welcome. It's for the Symposium.

BLAIN. The Symposium?

JANIE. That's what he calls it. [*Moving up right-centre*] We have one every Saturday night. [*Standing above the table*] About half a million people come in—well, a dozen, any-way—and ask him questions—about Julius Cæsar, and Wireless, and Patagonia—and he answers them all, right off.

BLAIN. A sort of one-man Brains Trust?

JANIE. That's right. But he talks more sense than that lot.

BLAIN. Where does he get all his information from?

JANIE. He carries a lot of it in his head. We have an encyclopædia, too—at least, very nearly. I mean— Well, I can't stand here listening to you all evening. So long! [*She goes out right, closing the inner door. Blain rises, and examines the books in the bookcase through the glass doors. Janie reappears right.*] It's no use doing that. It's locked. Here's Mr Vellacott and his daughter. Do you know them?

BLAIN [*up centre*]. The Rector? Yes.

JANIE. He's nice and she's sweet. [*She turns and speaks off*] Come in, both of you. Dr Blain's here. I'll be right back.

[*Janie disappears right, and the outer door bangs. The Rector, a genial man of middle age, appears in the vestibule and hangs up his hat, then enters with his daughter Ann, a pretty girl of twenty-one.*]

RECTOR. Good-evening, Doctor. [*He shakes hands.*] You know my Ann?

BLAIN [*shaking hands with Ann*]. I have that privilege.

ANN. Are you here on a job, or have you got let in for a Symposium?

BLAIN. Professionally. Mr Baxter has been in bed—with one of his legs! [*He moves down left-centre.*]

RECTOR [*cheerfully*]. That particular limb is famed throughout the parish! [*To the right of the sofa.*]

ANN. I'm here for the Symposium. I help Janie to attend to the customers. I must start cutting up bread and butter right away.

[*She takes off her hat and coat and goes out up left-centre.*]

RECTOR [*producing cigarette-case*]. I think we may presume. [*He offers the case.*]

BLAIN. Thank you. [*They light cigarettes.*]

RECTOR. How do you find our Mr Baxter?

BLAIN. I haven't met him yet.

RECTOR [*crossing down left to the fire*]. He's a strange old character, and most of his peculiarities are inherited—from a stranger old character still. [*With his back to the fire.*]

BLAIN. The late Archdeacon?

RECTOR. Ah, you've heard about him?

BLAIN. No; but I understand I'm going to.

RECTOR. You certainly will. Old Archdeacon Belford. He was a bachelor, and he lived alone among his books in that big house at the corner of the Green for nearly forty years. Alone, that is, except for Adam Baxter.

BLAIN. What was Baxter's exact position in the household?

RECTOR. By his own account he was the old man's confidential secretary, amanuensis, and librarian. My own private belief is that he cleaned the Archidiaconal boots.

BLAIN. But he inherited the Archidiaconal library [*indicating the bookcase*].

RECTOR. Only a few odd volumes, I fancy. He has added to it himself a good deal.

BLAIN. He seems to be an enlightened old fellow in his way.

RECTOR. Yes. He really has contrived to make his neighbours interested in literature. He reads aloud beautifully—Shakespeare, Tennyson, Homer——

BLAIN. Do you mean to say he can translate Homer from the original Greek?

RECTOR. Ah, that's what nobody knows. The peculiar thing about Baxter's Homer is that no one else is ever permitted to look inside it. If we could, I fancy we should find it printed in good honest English—Pope's translation, probably.

BLAIN. Then you think he's a humbug?

RECTOR. Oh, bless you, no! I believe he is a genuine

lover of learning, who likes to be thought a little more learned than he is. To that extent he's a pious fraud. But, my dear fellow—aren't we all? *[They laugh.]*

BLAIN. What would become of you and me if we weren't?

[Enter Ann up left-centre, with a plate of bread and butter, which she puts on the table left. She then crosses to centre.]

ANN. Well, there's the provender. *[She looks at the clock.]* It's about time the Symposium began to clock in.

[The outer door is heard to close; then voices are heard.]

BLAIN. There are some of them, I think.

ANN *[below the table right-centre]*. I rather fancy that's Janie, bringing home the lost sheep.

[Janie appears in the vestibule, hanging up Baxter's hat and muffler.]

JANIE. Take off those goloshes, and put them behind the door.

BAXTER'S VOICE. Yes, my dear.

JANIE *[entering]*. Well, I found him. *[At centre]* He was outside Timpenny's, sure enough, right in the fourpenny box.

[Adam Baxter enters, and comes down right-centre. He is an elderly man, with a refined face, a scholarly stoop, and a certain gentle courtesy of manner.]

ADAM *[bowing]*. Good-evening, Rector. My house is honoured by your presence. Good-evening, Miss Ann.

[He shakes hands with her.]

JANIE. Now shake hands with Dr Blain, and say you're sorry for keeping him waiting.

ADAM *[crossing to Blain]*. Pray forgive me, Doctor. *[They shake hands.]* When I find myself in the company of books I am apt to become oblivious.

[Janie and Ann move to the table up left and pour out lemon-squash into tumblers, etc.]

BLAIN. So I noticed when I passed you outside Tim-penny's.

ADAM. Was I reading this? [*He produces a small volume from his pocket and turns up centre, speaking to Janie.*] Only fourpence, my dear.

JANIE [*over her shoulder*]. That's right! We have money in galore!

BLAIN. You weren't reading it. You were dusting it, and smoothing out its dog's ears. I said to myself: "He handles a book as I would a delicate patient."

ADAM. A very apt comparison, sir. To me a tattered book *is* a patient, to be treated as such. The late Arch-deacon used to rally me on the subject.

[*He moves down right-centre.*]

JANIE [*coming down and putting the bread and butter on the table, right-centre*]. Now we're off!

RECTOR [*crossing to the right of the sofa*]. What is the book, Mr Baxter?

ADAM. I did not observe the title, sir. To me it was just a book, in need of first aid. Perhaps you would like to glance through it.

RECTOR [*taking the book*]. An anthology of some kind. Verse. Here's a passage that might apply to yourself. It's called "The Scholar."

[*He offers Adam the book.*]

ADAM. Please read it. I seem to have mislaid my glasses.

RECTOR [*reading*].

My days among the dead are passed;

Around me I behold,

Where'er these casual eyes are cast,

The mighty minds of old;

My never-failing friends are they,

With whom I converse day by day.

What do you think of that?

ADAM. A pleasant picture. An elderly student in his library, surrounded by his books.

[*He looks towards his "Library."*]

JANIE [*returning to the table up left*]. You can't surround yourself with one bookcase.

ADAM. The style seems familiar.

RECTOR. Robert Southey.

ADAM. Ah! Robert Southey! I should have known. He was Poet Laureate of England once. [*He quotes*] "My never-failing friends are they" . . . Thank you, Rector. Will you select one more passage, and see if I can identify the author this time?

JANIE [*coming down to Adam*]. Do you think the Doctor has come here to listen to you doing your home-work? Off you go into your bedroom, and let him overhaul you.

ADAM. Forgive me, Doctor. But could we have just one more selection?

BLAIN. Go ahead!

ADAM. Thank you, thank you! Now, Rector.

RECTOR. I think this one will stump you. [*He reads:*

—This man is freed from servile bands
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall—

ADAM. Thank you. I can complete that passage.

Lord of himself, though not of lands,
And having nothing, yet hath all.

[*Glibly*] The author was Sir Henry Wotton, one of our Elizabethan poets. I learned those lines from the late Archdeacon. They summarized his own philosophy. The tranquil spirit; the contented mind! "Lord of himself, though not of lands—"

[*He takes the arm of Janie, who is waiting to take him to the door. He smiles at her.*]

JANIE [*indicating the door left-centre*]. Off with you!

ADAM. Thank you, Rector. Now, Doctor, I am quite ready. [*He goes up centre.*]

JANIE. And about time. [*She opens the door for him.*]

ADAM. When we have finished, I should like you to have a peep at my library. Would you be interested?

BLAIN. Very much interested.

[*Adam and the Doctor go out together. The Rector sits on the sofa.*]

ANN [*above the sofa*]. Who are coming to the Symposium to-night, Janie?

JANIE. Mrs Caddick, Peter Croft, Doris Jenkins, anyway. Do you know them, Mr Vellacott?

[*Ann perches on the left arm of the sofa.*]

RECTOR. Mrs Caddick and Doris Jenkins, yes. Both members of my flock. Peter Croft used to be, but he seems to have lapsed of late.

JANIE. He's been having religious trouble. He thinks he's an agnostic, or something; so Grandfather's treating him for it.

RECTOR. If Mr Baxter's treatment fails, will you put in a word for me? After all, it *is* my job.

JANIE. Right. But he won't fail. All the same, I'd have religious trouble myself if I worked in Pettigrew's shop, like Peter.

RECTOR. What is wrong with Pettigrew's shop?

JANIE. Pettigrew. [*The Rector and Ann laugh.*] Do you know him?

RECTOR. I deal with him.

JANIE. What do you think of him?

RECTOR. I find him a pretty shrewd man of business.

JANIE. Yes; I don't like him either.

ANN. Neither do I.

JANIE. Him and me had a bit of an argument once about a bottle of cough mixture that Grandfather had never had, and I won. He's taken to coming to the Symposium lately, with his friend Mould, the undertaker, and trying to catch Grandfather out.

RECTOR. In what way?

JANIE. He asks him questions that come between P and Z.

RECTOR. I'm afraid I don't quite follow.

JANIE [*to the right of the sofa*]. Pettigrew and Mould have found out that we haven't got a whole encyclopædia—only nine volumes out of twelve. Ask us about anything from Aaron to Pragmatic Sanctions, and we're infallible; but put up one that comes between Prairie Oyster and Zymotic, and we're sunk! [*Cheerfully turning up right*] Well, let's forget Pettigrew and Mould. Perhaps they won't come to-night. It's time we turned the lights on and drew those curtains. [*She switches on the lights. Ann rises, crosses right, and draws the curtains. Janie, coming down centre*] Then there's Doris Jenkins. She's in the Youth Movement these days, and she's written a play. Cool! Eyes like a codfish, and no brains. She would write a play! [*Ann sits right of the table right-centre.*]

RECTOR. But why Mrs Caddick? Don't tell me she has written a play.

JANIE. What, with a husband and seven children? She's coming to ask about Adenoids. Grandfather has been looking them up for her. [*She takes up a volume of the Encyclopædia from the table.*] It's lucky they begin with an A. Would you like to hear about them? [*Turning over pages*] "Archæology, Algebra, Addison"—no, that's too far back. [*She finds the place.*] Here we are. [*She reads*] "Adenoid growths of the lym—lymphatic tissues of the upper throat occur in children from four to fourteen." Johnny Caddick

is eight. "The child breathes through the mouth"—where do they expect him to breathe; through his ear?—"suffers from slight deafness, and is stupid and sluggish, with characteristic facial expression." That takes off Johnny Caddick to the life. [*She makes a face like Johnny Caddick.*] "Cure is effected by a simple process of removal." Does that mean his face? A good job if it does!

[*The Rector and Ann laugh. Baxter and Blain re-enter up left-centre.*]

ADAM [*to the right of the sofa*]. A ripe scholar and a great gentleman, Doctor. And a great book-lover. He was fond of saying that a man surrounded by books finds himself in much better company than any he is likely to meet when he dines with his Bishop! Very characteristic!

JANIE. Never mind the Archdeacon! What does the Doctor say?

BLAIN [*above the sofa*]. Nothing serious; but he must rest that leg. I've told him to refrain from outdoor exercise for a week.

JANIE. I'll see to that. [*To Adam*] Sit down, old gentleman, right away, and make a good start.

ADAM [*indicating the book in her hand*]. What is that, my dear?

JANIE. The bit about adenoids, for Mrs Caddick.

[*She moves above the table right-centre.*]

BLAIN. Mrs Caddick? I'm treating a child of hers for adenoids at this moment.

ADAM [*turning to Blain*]. I hope you will not think that I am presuming, Doctor. Mrs Caddick is anxious to know exactly what adenoids are. I shall merely read to her the scientific definition of the ailment. The knowledge will comfort her surprisingly.

RECTOR [*rising*]. Come and sit here, Mr Baxter. [*He backs a little left.*] I must be going. Duty calls.

ADAM [*moving to below the sofa*]. To-morrow's sermon, sir?

RECTOR [*standing with his back to the fire*]. No. My congregation will have to put up with an old one to-morrow. To-night I take the chair at the final meeting of the Broxborough Library Board.

ADAM. To be sure. [*Sitting on the sofa*] The new Public Library. You have to settle the details of next Tuesday's formal opening?

RECTOR. Yes. [*Crossing to centre, and turning*] At least, I hope we shall settle them. But you know what Boards are—long, wooden, and narrow!

•ADAM. Is it to be an elaborate ceremony?

RECTOR [*at centre*]. A most grand affair. [*With a gesture*] Flags, a band, speeches——

BLAIN. Who is to declare the Library open?

RECTOR. Our esteemed Lord-Lieutenant, the Earl of Broxborough.

ANN. Always assuming he remembers to turn up.

BLAIN. What form will the ceremony take?

RECTOR. On the stroke of noon in the Market Square His Lordship will mount the steps of the Library, in the presence of assembled Broxborough, and knock three times upon the closed doors. The band will stop playing——

ANN. We hope—but they're apt to get carried away!

RECTOR. Then the Mayor, who has been standing all this time just inside the doors, will call out in a loud voice: "Who goes there?" The Earl will inform him.

ANN. If he can remember his own name.

RECTOR. The doors will then be thrown open—if they will open, but you know what our local contractors are——

ANN. And the Mayor will tell the Earl to wipe his boots and walk right in.

RECTOR [*smiling at her*]. Let us refrain from ribald em-

bellishments, my child. The Mayor will then present the key of the Library to his Lordship——

ANN. Who will probably lose it.

RECTOR. After that, D.V., we shall all have lunch. I presume you have been invited, Doctor.

BLAIN. I have. I suppose there will be numerous speeches.

RECTOR. This is a cathedral town! I must be off. [*He shakes hands with Adam.*] Good-night, Mr Baxter. [*Turning to Janie*] Good-night, Janie.

JANIE. I'll see you to the door.

RECTOR. Thank you. Good-night, Doctor.

BLAIN [*above the left end of the sofa*]. Good-night. [*The Rector and Janie go out right.*] You were going to show me your library, Mr Baxter.

ADAM [*rising*]. I see you are determined to gratify my vanity, sir. Now, where is the key?

[*He goes to the mantelpiece, gets the key from behind the clock, crosses up right-centre, and opens the bookcase.*

[*Blain has followed across to the table right-centre.*

BLAIN [*quietly to Ann, taking her hand for a moment*]. Darling! [*Ann smiles, places her finger on her lips, then on his.*

ADAM [*at the open bookcase*]. There, Doctor. A humble collection, but mine own. And it grows, it grows!

[*Ann moves down right.*

BLAIN [*coming to the bookcase left of Adam*]. Everything numbered, I see.

ADAM. Yes. That makes it easy to put a book back in the right place.

BLAIN [*indicating a row of uniform volumes on the top shelf*]. That's the Encyclopædia, I suppose?

ADAM. Yes. And here—[*he takes out a large book*] Number

Fourteen. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. [*He hands it to him.*] With Doré's illustrations. A lovely edition.

BLAIN [*examining the book*]. A bequest from the Arch-deacon?

ADAM. Yes, among others.

[*Janie reappears right, and stands watching Adam and Blain. She looks a little anxious. Ann is over right, in the window.*]

BLAIN [*handing back "Pilgrim's Progress," and inspecting the other books*]. Here's an important-looking volume—Number Forty-seven.

[*He takes a large book out of the bottom shelf. Adam tries to prevent him, but too late. Next moment Janie has crossed the room and snatched the book from him.*]

JANIE. You mustn't touch that. It's Presentation!

[*She holds the book to her, defiantly, backing a pace right.*]

ADAM [*hastily*]. Janie is my librarian. She is always a little jealous of letting our presentation volumes out of her own hands.

[*He takes the book from Janie, who moves to the table up left.*]

BLAIN. What is the book?

ADAM [*after slight hesitation, replacing the book*]. The Works of Shakespeare, given me many years ago by a few intimate friends. Janie regards it almost as sacred. [*He takes another book from an upper shelf.*] Here is the Archdeacon's Wordsworth, with his own name in it. [*He hands the book to Blain, who examines it.*] He was a great admirer of Wordsworth. He called him Nature's poet.

[*The sound of the knocker is heard on the outer door.*]

JANIE [*turning*]. Hallo! Here they come!

[*She comes left-centre above the sofa.*]

ANN. I'll let them in.

JANIE. Thank you, dear. [*Ann runs out right.*
[*To Adam*] Now sit down, and don't let anybody talk you to death. [*Adam comes down and sits on the sofa. Janie takes the Wordsworth from Blain.*] Thank you, I'll put that one away. [*She crosses him to the bookcase and puts the book away.*] Let me see, have we got out all the books we want for to-night? Encyclopædia, Shakespeare—

[*Blain moves down to above the sofa.*

ADAM. Paley's *Evidences*.

JANIE. Number Nineteen. Right. [*She takes a book from an upper shelf, and gives it to Adam.*] There!

ANN [*in the outer lobby*]. Come in, Mrs Caddick. Come in, you two. [*She enters.*] Here are Mrs Caddick and Doris Jenkins and a friend of hers. [*She crosses to Blain.*

[*Enter Mrs Caddick, who moves down centre. She is a middle-aged working-woman, dressed in her best for this occasion. She is followed by Doris Jenkins, a spectacled young shop-girl, and her friend Ada Bone, best described as a dumb blonde.*

ADAM [*rising and shaking hands*]. Good-evening, Mrs Caddick. I was hoping to see you. You are well, I trust?

MRS CADDICK [*right of the sofa, respectfully*]. We can't complain, Mr Baxter.

ADAM. The right spirit! Doris, welcome, my dear. I have read your play. You possess a vivid imagination.

DORIS [*down right, with Ada on her left*]. Oh, reelly, Mr Baxter? Thanks ever so! [*Pushing Ada forward*] This is Ada Bone: I brought her along. Me and her work in the Co-op together.

ADAM [*shaking hands*]. I am happy to meet you, Ada.

JANIE [*above and right of the table*]. Don't say you've been and written a play too, Ada. [*Ada shakes her head, and giggles.*] Thank goodness for something, anyway! [*Leading her up-stage*] This is Doctor Blain.

[Ada and Doris go up and shake hands with the Doctor. Ann brings them glasses of lemon-squash, etc.]

MRS CADDICK. If you please, Mr Baxter, I can't stay very long. This is Saturday night——

ADAM. And your household demands your attention? *[Crossing to right]* To be sure. Pray be seated. *[Mrs Caddick sits right of the table, right-centre, facing down stage: Adam sits in the swivel-chair at his desk, and turns to her, with his back almost to the audience. Blain moves down left, in front of the fire. Ann perches on the left arm of the sofa, talking to him.]* I have been consulting the appropriate authority on the subject of Adenoids and Adenitis. *[He opens the Encyclopædia where a marker has been left in.]* Let me summarize the result of my researches. *[He begins to read: Janie, up left-centre, is watching him, as usual. Mrs Caddick listens respectfully.]* "Adenoid growths of the—of the——"

JANIE *[coming down centre quickly]*. "Of the lymphatic tissues of the upper throat." It's no use trying to read that small print without your specs; here they are.

[She picks up his spectacles from the table right-centre, and hands them to him.]

ADAM. Thank you, my dear. *[He puts them on and continues reading]* "—of the lymphatic tissues of the upper throat occur in children of four to fourteen."

[Mrs Caddick nods, in confirmation of this.]

JANIE *[between Adam and Mrs Caddick]*. That's better!

[She goes up-stage again, and Adam continues reading. What he reads is already familiar to the audience, so it is not necessary that they should distinguish all he says. The rest of the party may therefore move about freely, having refreshments and maintaining a low hum of conversation. The knocker sounds again, and Janie goes out right.]

ADAM. "The child breathes through the mouth——"

MRS CADDICK. That's right, Mr Baxter: he does. And snores somethink awful! [Re-enter Janie.

JANIE. Here's Corporal Tanner and Peter Croft.

[Corporal Tanner and Peter hang up their hats in the vestibule, and enter. Tanner is a stout man of over fifty. Over his breast pocket he wears the ribbons of the 1914-18 medals and the Military Medal. He is in civilian clothes. Peter Croft is twenty-one, delicate and dreamy-looking. Adam shakes hands with them, without rising.

ADAM. Good-evening, Corporal.

TANNER. Good-evening, Mr Baxter, sir. A bit sharp, for April.

ADAM. Indeed, yes. You know Doctor Blain?

TANNER. Yes; and he knows me, inside out, you might say. [He goes over to the fire and shakes hands.] Good-evening, Doctor.

[He stands down left-centre, below the sofa, talking to Blain.

ADAM. Peter, I have a book for you. I think we spoke of it—Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*. Many a hungry soul have I fed from it. [He hands the book to Peter.]

PETER [earnestly]. Anything from your hand, Mr Baxter.

ADAM. The late Archdeacon used to say, "I always come back to Paley: the modernists may scoff, but he is unanswerable." [Blain and the Corporal sit on the sofa. Peter goes over and sits in the chair below the fire, where he at once begins to read Paley. Ann brings him refreshments. He takes them with a smile, but soon becomes absorbed in Paley.] Forgive me, Mrs Caddick. [He reads] "Cure is effected by a simple process of removal." [He closes the book.] There, that is all you will wish to learn from me. The rest we can safely leave to the Doctor. You must have a chat with him presently.

[Meanwhile Blain has started an overlapping conversation with Tanner.]

BLAIN. Are you a regular visitor here, Corporal?

TANNER. Very regular, sir. Mr Baxter is teaching me to read.

BLAIN. Can't they read in the Army?

TANNER. Oh, yes, sir. I once drew threepence a day extra for knowing how to. What I mean is, Mr Baxter is teaching me to read things *worth* reading. He says I've been starved for years.

BLAIN. You surprise me!

TANNER. He means up here, sir *[tapping his forehead]*.

MRS CADDICK *[rising]*. Thank you, Mr Baxter, I'm sure. It's nice to know *exactly* what's wrong with you.

ADAM. That is a penetrating observation, Mrs Caddick.
[Ann brings Mrs Caddick refreshments.]

ANN. Now, Mrs Caddick.

MRS CADDICK. Oh, thank you, miss.

ADAM *[to Doris Jenkins, who, with Ada, has been edging up to him]*. Now, Doris, I am ready for you. *[He goes right to his desk.]* Here is your manuscript. I have taken the liberty of marking one or two passages.

[He looks through the manuscript.]

[Doris and Ada come down right of the table right-centre.]

Blain catches Ann's eye. She brings two glasses of lemon-squash, and sits beside him on the sofa.

JANIE *[taking the chair to the left of the table right-centre]*. Sit here, Mrs Caddick. I've got some rock-cakes in the oven. They ought to be about ready now. *[Mrs Caddick sits. To Tanner, who is examining his book up by the bookcase]* Sit down, Corporal.

[Tanner takes a chair from the back wall, and sits.]

Janie closes the bookcase, rather pointedly, and goes out up left-centre.

[*All the above movements have overlapped with the opening of Adam's conversation with Doris, as follows:*

ADAM. You would prefer me to be absolutely candid in my criticisms?

DORIS. Oh, yes, please, Mr Baxter. Can Ada listen?

ADAM. Certainly. [*Ada sits right of the table right-centre. Doris takes the chair right above the desk, brings it to the right of Ada, and sits.*] In the first place, I confess I am not greatly attracted by your title—*Revolting Youth*. That might be taken in more ways than one, you know.

DORIS. I hadn't thought of that. I'll change it. We don't want the Dichards and the Vested Interests to get the laugh on us.

ADAM. Then, the behaviour of some of your characters. For instance, this episode in the Duke's palace in Transylvania. I have never met a duke, but I do not think that in order to receive a deputation of factory workers a duke would wear his coronet, even in Transylvania.

DORIS. But if he doesn't wear it, how can the deputation knock it off?

[*Ada giggles again.*

ADAM. And I have marked one of your stage-directions. . . . "Dog wags tail, and barks." . . . Could the dog invariably be relied on, do you think? Also, some of your scenic effects strike me as a little over-ambitious—especially the end of Act Two, where the Duke is blown up among his own oil-wells, and "perishes amid a sea of flame."

DORIS. I saw that in a movie.

ADAM. But why not write a play set in a scene really familiar to you, containing characters drawn from your own acquaintance and walk of life?

DORIS. You mean people like Ada, and Peter Croft? Nobody wants a story about *them*!

ADAM. Nevertheless, it was from such homespun material that the Brontë sisters achieved immortality.

DORIS. Oh! Who were they?

[Janie bustles in up left-centre with the rock-cakes.]

JANIE. Now, then, one for everybody, and then it's time we settled down to real business. *[To Doris and Ada]* Have a rock-cake, you two! *[They each take one.]* Grandfather, get on that sofa. *[Adam rises and goes to the sofa. Blain and Ann rise, make way for him. Ann sits on the left arm. Blain breaks to the fireplace.]* And keep that leg up. *[She hands round the rock-cakes, and everybody settles down for the Symposium.]* Come down by the fire, Mrs Caddick. Peter, get out of that chair.

[Peter rises, and sits on the stool below the sofa where he can look up into Adam's face. At this point the other characters are set as follows:]

Doris and Ada. Above and left of table right-centre.

Tanner on a chair above and left of Ada.

Janie on a chair right of the sofa.

Ann on the left arm of the sofa.

Blain on the chair above the fireplace.

Mrs Caddick on the chair below the fireplace.

Adam on the sofa.

[NOTE. *If the stage is not furnished quite as described, the relative positions of the characters should be the same.*]

ADAM *[looking round the room]*. I think we have a quorum.

JANIE. Any questions to-night? Get them off your minds. *[There is no response.]*

ADAM. Probably some questions will be put later, arising out of our subject-matter. What would you like me to read?

CORPORAL. We can always leave that to you, sir.

ADAM. We have had no Shakespeare for three weeks. I was glancing through *The Tempest* only this morning. [*Janie immediately hands him the book, open at the place.*] A strange, enchanting fantasy. May I read a few passages? [*There is a general murmur of assent.*] The opening scene does not lend itself to reading aloud. It describes a shipwreck, and calls for action rather than words. We will pass to another. [*The knocker sounds off right, loudly and continuously.*] I wonder who that can be?

JANIE. I give you just one guess.

[*She goes out right. All listen constrainedly, as the knocker continues to sound.*]

[*Off right*] Oh, it's you two, is it?

PETTIGREW'S VOICE. Right, first time, my dear. Is the Oracle on tap to-night?

JANIE. The Symposium's begun. Hang up your hats, and less noise! [*The outer door closes. Janie appears.*] Mr Pettigrew and Mr Mould.

[*Pettigrew and Mould appear, hanging up their hats. Pettigrew is the local chemist, a sharp-featured man of about fifty. He looks round the room patronizingly.*]

PETTIGREW. Well, well, here we are again, come to have our poor ignorant intellects improved! Good-evening, all! Good-evening, Mr Baxter!

[*Adam has risen. So has Peter Croft, who moves down left, above Mrs Caddick, surveying his employer rather apprehensively.*]

ADAM. Good-evening, Mr Pettigrew. [*He shakes hands.*] And Mr Mould. You are welcome.

PETTIGREW [*looking around*]. Ah, my friend and colleague, Doctor Blain. Good-evening!

BLAIN. Good-evening.

ADAM. Pray be seated, gentlemen. You are just in time.

PETTIGREW. I'm glad to hear it. We didn't want to miss anything; did we, Mr Mould?

MOULD [*he is the Broxborough undertaker, and has an air of professional solemnity which contrasts with Pettigrew's facetious humour*]. No, Mr Pettigrew. No, indeed!

[*He winks at Pettigrew.*

JANIE [*indicating right of the stage*]. This way. Sit here, Mr Mould [*indicating the right of the table*], and you here, Mr Pettigrew [*indicating the swivel-chair at Adam's desk*]. Then you'll be two boys together.

PETTIGREW. We usually are.

JANIE. I often wonder what you see in one another. Still, I suppose it's only natural—a dispensing chemist and an undertaker. I expect Mr Pettigrew puts quite a lot of business in your way, Mr Mould.

MOULD [*thoughtlessly*]. That's right.

[*Janie goes up left with a little chuckle.*

[*Realizing his error*] No!

[*But it is too late. Doris and Ada giggle again.*

JANIE [*returning with refreshments*]. Here's two nice glasses of lemon-squash for you. You can smoke.

[*She returns to her seat.*

ADAM. Now, are we all ready?

JANIE. Quite ready.

PETTIGREW. I hope we're going to have some Homer to-night. I always enjoy hearing you spouting out that stuff, Mr Baxter.

ADAM. I shall be happy to read a passage for you presently. Only a rough rendering, of course. But first we are going to have a little Shakespeare—*The Tempest*. The scene is laid outside Prospero's cell. [*The lights begin to go down.*]
“Prospero, the rightful Duke of Milan, is living in exile,

his kingdom having been usurped by his brother Antonio. In this scene he presides over the wedding festivities of his daughter Miranda and her lover Ferdinand——”

[By this time the lights have gone right down. Black out, or curtain, for half a minute, to denote a short lapse of time. Adam's voice has died gradually away. Presently it is heard again, growing louder. The lights come on again slowly. The party are listening intently, except Mould, who has gone to sleep. Janie has disappeared. Peter is seated on the floor below the left end of the sofa, listening intently.]

. . . And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

[He lays down the book and continues to recite, apparently from memory.]

We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

[There is a pause, then murmurs of thanks all round. Pettigrew nudges Mould, who wakes with a start, knocking a book off the table. Janie comes bustling in left-centre, with a tray of cups.]

JANIE. Interval for cocoa and conversation. Come and help yourselves.

[There is a general uprising. Doris, Ada, and Tanner come to the tray, where Ann gives them cocoa. Peter Croft rises and breaks to the fireplace. Pettigrew and Mould talk furtively together.]

Janie brings Adam a cup of cocoa. Mrs Caddick rises, and comes to Janie, centre.

MRS CADDICK. I'm afraid I must be going now, dear.

JANIE. That's all right, Mrs Caddick. Give my love to Johnny. Say good-night to Grandfather.

MRS CADDICK [*to Adam*]. Thank you kindly, Mr Baxter.
[*Peter sits in the chair down left.*]

ADAM. Thank you for your company, Mrs Caddick.

MRS CADDICK [*to Janie*]. I'd like to come again some time. I don't understand it all, but it's a nice rest.

JANIE. Any time you want another, trot right along.
[*Going to the door right*] I'll see you out.

• [*They go out together. Pettigrew goes and takes his stand at centre, on the left of the table.*]

PETTIGREW [*loudly*]. Now, what about this Homer?

ADAM. I am quite ready, Mr Pettigrew.

PETTIGREW. So are we. [*Turning to Mould*] Aren't we, Mr Mould?

MOULD. Quite ready! [*They grin at each other.*]

ADAM. I am entirely at your service, gentlemen. [*The others resume their seats. The outer door bangs, and Janie comes hurrying in, to right-centre. She looks suspiciously from Pettigrew to Mould.*] My dear, Mr Pettigrew has just reminded me of my promise to read a passage of Homer.

JANIE. Oh, has he?

ADAM. I have a short selection in mind. Will you kindly hand me my *Iliad*—Number Sixty-three? [*Janie takes the book from the bookcase and brings it to him.*] Thank you. [*He opens the book.*] I should like to read to you Homer's description of the parting between Hector, the warrior son of King Priam, and his wife Andromache. A curiously human little episode in so vast an epic!

JANIE [*to Pettigrew*]. You can sit down.

[*She sits on the right arm of the sofa.*]

PETTIGREW. I prefer to stand. Before we commence, Mr Baxter, is a question permitted?

ADAM. Certainly; unless you would be content to wait until I have read the passage.

PETTIGREW. No, we'll have it now. Ask him our question, Mr Mould.

MOULD [*down right-centre*]. Mr Pettigrew and me were wondering if you could give us any information about an ancient Greek party of the name of—what was the name, Mr Pettigrew?

PETTIGREW. Strophanthus.

MOULD. That's right—Strophanthus. [*Janie looks at him suspiciously.*] What part of Homer does he come in?

PETTIGREW. Yes; where?

ADAM. Strophanthus! It has a fine ring about it. A warrior's name! Can you picture him leading his troops into battle—inciting them to deeds of valour—

PETTIGREW. Who was he?

ADAM [*obviously a little put out, but recovering himself*]. Now let me think. Where does he occur? The *Iliad*, I should say: not the *Odyssey*. I must search my memory. If you will give me a little time—

JANIE. We'll have your old Strap-hankus all ready for you next Saturday.

PETTIGREW. I wonder!

JANIE [*sharply*]. What do you mean—wonder?

PETTIGREW [*grinning*]. Strophanthus begins with an S.

MOULD. It comes between Prairie Oyster and Zymotic! [*He giggles.*]

JANIE. What do you mean—"it"?

PETTIGREW. I mean we've caught you out, Mr Baxter.

JANIE [*rising, fiercely*]. Now, look here, you two—!

ADAM [*gently*]. My dear, my dear! Of course Mr Pettigrew and Mr Mould will grant me time for

reflection. Strophanthus is only a minor character in Homer——

PETTIGREW [*centre*]. You're telling us! I should say he *was* a minor character! So minor, he doesn't come in Homer at all! He isn't even a person. Is he, Mr Mould?

MOULD [*down right-centre*]. No. Poor uneducated chemists like Mr Pettigrew think Strophanthus is the name of a drug, used as a heart stimulant! Isn't that so, Doctor?

BLAIN [*left of the sofa*]. It is the name of a drug, but it's a Greek word all the same. I expect it does occur in Homer.

PETTIGREW [*to below the right end of the sofa*]. Then let Mr Baxter find it for us. Or let me find it for myself!

[He suddenly takes the book from Adam's hands and returns to centre.]

ADAM [*desperately*]. Please, please!

JANIE [*left of Pettigrew; making a snatch at the book*]. Here, you give that back to me!

PETTIGREW [*holding her off, and turning away down left*]. Just a minute, just a minute!

[He finds himself face to face with Peter, who has risen.]

PETER. Give her back that book at once, you boor! 'Do you hear?

PETTIGREW. Yes, my lad, I do hear. And while we're about it, you're fired!

PETER. I wouldn't stay, anyway!

[He tries to get the book. Janie to above centre of the sofa.]

MOULD [*to left-centre*]. Stand away, my lad!

[Pettigrew retains the book and crosses back to centre, on the left of Mould. There is silence. All have risen except Adam, Doris, and Ada. Peter goes down left, distressed.]

PETTIGREW [*who has opened the book and glanced through it giving a long whistle*]. I thought so! I thought so!

ADAM. Give it back, please!

BLAIN [*coming below the right end of the sofa*]. Are you a Greek scholar, Pettigrew?

PETTIGREW. No, Doctor. Greek's Greek to me. But I do know German when I see it!

ADAM. Some of the footnotes are in German. The thoroughness of German scholarship is proverbial—

PETTIGREW [*interrupting him*]. Footnotes my foot! This is an old German grammar—bought second hand out of Timpenny's fourpenny box, I expect. [*He hands the book to Mould.*] There's your Oracle! A fine ripe scholar *he* is!

MOULD. Ripe? He's rotten! A rotten old fraud!

[There is a gasp of indignation from the others. Doris and Ada sit spellbound with excitement, holding hands. Adam sinks back on to the sofa. Janie comes down to him, on his left. The knocker sounds. Only Ann hears it. She goes out right.]

BLAIN [*moving to the left of Pettigrew and Mould*]. You two can say good-night. I'm not going to have one of my patients upset by silly practical jokes.

PETTIGREW. This is no joke, Doctor. Look! [*He thrusts the book into Blain's hands, who moves up left-centre behind the sofa. Pettigrew turns to Adam.*] I'm sorry, Baxter, but you've brought this on yourself. Hasn't he, Mr Mould?

MOULD. He's been asking for it.

PETTIGREW. Shall I tell you what your trouble is, Baxter? Over-ambition. Just an old faker, trying to climb above your station!

JANIE [*rising and going right up to Pettigrew*]. Ambition? Station? Coo—don't make us laugh! Whose daughter wants to marry the Curate, only he won't? [*Doris and Ada burst into giggles.*] Whose wife gives parties, and nobody comes?

PETTIGREW [*angrily*]. That'll be all from you, my girl!

JANIE. No, not quite all. Before you go I'll tell you how

this happened. [*She takes the book from Blain.*] It was my mistake: I gave him the wrong book, that's all. He hadn't his specs on, and never noticed. He knows Homer by heart, anyway—almost—— [*She crosses down left to Peter.*

[*The Rector has appeared in the doorway right, with Ann.*

RECTOR. Good-evening, everybody. [*All turn, and make way for him. Pettigrew and Mould move down right. Ann crosses to Blain, above the sofa.*] Mr Baxter, I intrude once more.

ADAM. You are always welcome, Rector.

[*Janie sits on the sofa left of Adam.*

RECTOR [*right of the sofa*]. The Symposium appears to be on the point of dissolution.

PETTIGREW. Dissolution is right!

RECTOR. Then I am glad I arrived in time. I have some news of special interest to its members. [*He looks around at the company, and makes the announcement*] The new Public Library. We have just concluded the final arrangements for next Tuesday. The last item of the programme is to be the delivery of an oration upon the pleasures of reading. "The Blessing of Books" it is to be called.

PETTIGREW [*rather too eagerly*]. Who is going to do it?

RECTOR. Various names were suggested. The first was that of Lord Broxborough himself; but it was urged, I think with truth, that he had his hands full, too full, already. [*The company, welcoming the chance to break the present tension, all laugh.*] His Worship the Mayor, on his part, declined the honour at once. The Bishop was next proposed; but the forces of Chapel delivered a prompt and effective counter-attack. [*There is laughter at this.*] Then I put my oar in.

BLAIN [*above the left end of the sofa*]. Who was your selection, Rector?

ANN [*right of Blain*]. Let's all try to guess!

RECTOR. What we really needed, I said, was a speaker

who could represent the people who were actually going to use the Library. [*Moving a little right-centre*] He should be a resident in Broxborough, generally known and respected. If a man of literary or scientific leanings as well, so much the better. Don't you agree, Mr Pettigrew?

[*He lays his hand on Pettigrew's shoulder.*]

PETTIGREW. Oh, yes, indeed, Rector.

RECTOR [*turning back to the sofa*]. And so I proposed the man who had been in my mind all along—our friend, our very dear friend [*he lays his hand on Adam's shoulder*] Adam Baxter. My motion was carried with acclamation.

[*He shakes hands with Adam, and moves over to the fire.*]

[*All break into applause and cheers, except, of course, Pettigrew and Mould, who both rise indignantly. Blain crosses briskly down right-centre to Pettigrew.*]

BLAIN [*promptly shaking hands*]. Good-night, Mr Pettigrew.

TANNER [*shaking hands with Mould*]. Good-night, old man.

[*Blain moves up left-centre to Ann.*]

JANIE [*rising*]. Oh, must you be going? I'll see you out. [*Crossing up right*] This way. [*She pauses at the door. Mould goes out. Pettigrew gives a defiant glance round the room, but public opinion is obviously against him.*] All well at home, Mr Pettigrew? Curate called lately?

[*Pettigrew snarls and goes out. Janie follows him, and the outer door is heard to close.*]

DORIS [*rising*]. Ada, isn't it exciting? Come on home! [*To Janie, who has re-entered*] We must pop off now, Janie. We're ever so pleased about Mr Baxter.

JANIE [*in a rather subdued voice*]. Thank you, dears. Good-night.

[*Doris and Ada go out, followed by Janie. Ann stands at the back of the sofa, looking anxiously down upon Adam. Blain is now sitting beside him.*]

Peter crosses up right, and stands talking to Tanner.

BLAIN. Lean back, Mr Baxter, and take things easy for a minute. [*Ann puts a cushion behind Adam's back.*]

RECTOR. I'm afraid Mr Baxter has been overtaking his strength.

BLAIN. He has had a rather unusual evening. He'll be all right presently.

[*He rises and moves to above the table right-centre.*]

RECTOR. Well, he's best left in your hands. Ann, my dear, it's time we were going. [*He goes up right-centre.*]

TANNER [*to Peter*]. Us too.

• [*Peter nods, and comes down to the right of the sofa.*]

PETER. Good-night, Mr Baxter, sir.

[*Tanner comes down right-centre. Adam sits up, and speaks in a firm voice.*]

ADAM. Rector, Peter, Corporal— [*All stand fast.*] I shall be grateful if you will remain. You are my friends. I have something to say to you.

RECTOR. Another time. Please don't weary yourself any further to-night. [*Janie re-enters.*]

• ADAM. Thank you, I am quite myself again. In a sense I have just come to myself. Please be seated. [*All sit, except Janie, who comes to the right end of the sofa. The Rector takes the chair below the fire. The Doctor and Ann are above and left of the table right-centre. Tanner and Peter sit at the desk, and right of the table respectively.*] Rector, first may I offer my respectful thanks for the high honour conferred upon me by the Library Board. I shall never, never forget it, so long as I live. But I cannot accept it.

RECTOR. But why not?

ADAM. I am not worthy.

RECTOR. We think you are.

ADAM [*to Janie*]. My dear, please hand my Homer to the

RECTOR. [*He picks up the German grammar and hands it to her. She hesitates, but Adam nods his head, and she obeys. The Rector takes the book, and glances through it in a puzzled fashion. Janie moves up left of the sofa.*] To-night Mr Pettigrew informed me, in the presence of my friends here, that I was an impostor.

BLAIN. But that was a misunderstanding. That book was handed to you in error——

ADAM. There was no error, Doctor. Mr Pettigrew was right. I am an impostor.

RECTOR. But why—how?

ADAM. Because I do not possess a Homer. Neither do I possess a presentation Shakespeare, nor a Shakespeare of any kind.

BLAIN. But——

ADAM [*to Janie*]. My dear, show the doctor our Shakespeare.

JANIE. Must I?

ADAM. Yes, it is time.

JANIE [*crossing to the table right-centre*]. Well, I'm glad, on the whole. [*Handing the book to the Doctor*] Shakespeare—presentation. A London Telephone Directory, fifteen years old! Would you like to see any more, anybody? [*She goes up to the bookcase, all watching. She takes out another large volume.*] Lord Byron. He's a bulb catalogue! [*She holds open the book for a moment for all to see.*] The two top shelves are what they say they are: they came from the Archdeacon's. But these! [*She drops 'Byron' on the floor, and takes out two or three smaller books.*] Just any old rubbish that he could pick up second hand. He's been doing it for years. Old school-books, guide-books, anything. What did it matter what was inside them? They all came alike to him.

[*She comes down right of Adam.*]

RECTOR. So do all books, to the true book-lover.

ADAM. You misunderstand, Rector. When my granddaughter tells you that these books all come alike to me, she means that all convey precisely the same message to me. And that message—is nothing at all! I can neither read nor write! [*All turn to him in speechless astonishment. Janie sits on the right arm of the sofa. Presently Adam continues*] Yes, I—the retired scholar, the Oracle of Broxborough—am wholly illiterate.

TANNER. But you read aloud to us, Mr Baxter, whole pages! We've heard you, all of us.

ADAM. No, Corporal. You have merely heard me recite passages committed to memory. All just pretence—make-believe—foolish pride! [*There is a short silence.*]

RECTOR. You were born before the days of free and compulsory education, I take it.

ADAM. Yes, sir. That was the primary cause.

RECTOR. But later—surely——?

ADAM. My earliest recollection is of life on board a canal barge, always on the move—through some grimy Midland town or green stretch of countryside. You cannot provide education for children so reared even to-day. My own parents were totally illiterate. I remained illiterate with them.

BLAIN. I expect you were contented enough. No school-books . . .

ADAM. True, Doctor. But when I reached early manhood I began to meet young men and women who could read the newspaper, and books from the public library, and discuss the topics of the day intelligently. Then I realized my disability. I resolved to overcome it.

JANIE. He went to a night school. Tell them, dear.

ADAM. I was kindly enough received. They asked me what classes I wished to take. Mathematics—Science—Languages? [*Helplessly*] You see!

JANIE. He was twenty-five. How could he stand there and tell them he'd come to learn his A B C? Could *you*?

BLAIN. I doubt it.

ADAM. I turned and hurried out of the building.

TANNER. I'd have done the same, every time.

ADAM. In due course I married—a woman as unlettered as myself. Who else was there? For two years we were happy enough. Then she was taken from me, leaving me with a small daughter.

JANIE. My mother—not me!

ADAM. You may be sure I took care that she should be educated. At one moment I had cherished a dream that I might share her studies. But she was too quick—too quick! She grew up in a flash, it seemed to me . . . married . . . passed out of my life . . . and I went on alone again. But not entirely alone now. I had made a discovery.

JANIE. He'd found out he could learn things off by heart—right off.

ADAM. Yes. The words of a song, a paragraph from a newspaper, even an interesting conversation . . . I found I could memorize them all without effort. •

RECTOR. Nature's compensation!

ADAM. And consolation!

JANIE. Tell them about the Archdeacon.

ADAM. That was the greatest consolation of all. One day, I drifted into this town in search of work. I was almost penniless, but I paused, as if by instinct, outside a book-seller's shop.

PETER. Timpenny's, Mr Baxter?

ADAM. Yes, but long before Timpenny's time, Peter. An elderly clergyman was turning over some odd volumes. We fell into conversation. I asked him if he could help me to obtain employment. He invited me to his house. I told him

my story, and it seemed to move him, strangely. He took me into his service, and there I remained for nearly thirty years.

RECTOR. I suppose you told him . . . ?

ADAM. Yes; I told him everything: and he said it was no matter—his eyes should serve for both of us. Every evening he read aloud to me—the classics, poetry, history, even fiction at times—and almost every sentence of it is stored in my mind to-day.

TANNER. It's a damn miracle!

ADAM [*looking affectionately at Janie*]. And where my old master left off, this gallant little accomplice of mine continued.

JANIE. I helped him to get up his stuff for his old Symposium! Learned him in it, like a lesson.

ADAM. There, Rector. Now you know the full extent of my imposture.

RECTOR [*smiling, as he rises*]. I have encountered imposture in more reprehensible forms! So have most of us, I fancy!

JANIE. Of course they have! [*Fiercely*] Is it a fraud to help people the only way you can? And he tried to learn. He did try!

PETER [*rising suddenly, and speaking for the first time without diffidence*]. What does it matter? [*All turn to him, with interest.*] What does it matter if Mr Baxter can't read—or write? He doesn't need to! Why? Because he's a saint! A man that walks with God! I know that! And if you walk with God—you don't have to correspond with Him! Do you? [*Peter looks about him; earnestly.*]

RECTOR [*crossing to Peter*]. I think our friend Peter has expressed the sense of the meeting. [*He lays his hand on Peter's shoulder. There is an approving murmur.*] Now, we really must go. [*Turning to Adam*] Mr Baxter, you will

deliver the oration on Tuesday? It isn't half bad: I wrote it myself. *[All laugh. Janie rises.]*

ANN *[rising]*. Janie will coach you. *[Blain rises.]*

TANNER. It'll be your crowning hour, sir.

JANIE. And what a punch in the jaw for Pettigrew and Mould!

RECTOR. You accept?

ADAM *[rising]*. On one condition, sir.

RECTOR. Yes?

ADAM. The oration must come from my heart, and not from my memory.

RECTOR. You would prefer to compose it yourself?

ADAM. If you please.

RECTOR. Better and better!

[The Doctor and Ann have been edging towards the door. Now they slip out, unnoticed.]

ADAM. I shall begin by telling my audience the story I have tried to tell you.

RECTOR. I think you are right.

ADAM. I know I am right.

[He is right of the sofa with Janie.]

RECTOR *[shaking hands]*. Good-night, Mr Baxter. *[Looking round]* Ann, my child! What's become of her?

JANIE. She's gone. So has the Doctor! They're having a symposium of their own, I expect.

RECTOR *[smiling]*. That is not beyond the bounds of possibility! Good-night, my dear!

[He goes out, having shaken hands with Janie, who follows him to the door.]

TANNER *[crossing to Adam and shaking hands]*. Good-night, Mr Baxter, sir.

ADAM. Good-night, Corporal.

[Tanner turns up right, shakes hands with Janie, and goes out. Peter Croft comes last. He shakes hands

silently. Adam pats him on the shoulder. Janie follows him out, and Adam is left alone. He looks round the room, moving right, with a contented sigh. His eye falls upon the volume which he bought that afternoon, still lying open at Sir Henry Wotton's poem, on his desk. He picks it up and moves to below the table right-centre. Janie is heard shutting and bolting the outer door. She now enters, comes down left of Adam, and takes his arm.

JANIE. Well, old gentleman?

ADAM. "—And having nothing, yet hath all"!

[She smiles, takes the book from him, closes it, and lays it down; then leads him up towards the door up left-centre.

CURTAIN

Jenny in the Orchard

By Charles Thomas

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CHARACTERS

MRS ARTHUR CRANLEIGH

THOMAS EDENFOLD

JENNY HEYCROFT

TOM EDENFOLD

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to the author, Mr Charles Thomas, c/o The British
Drama League, 9 Fitzroy Square, London, W.1*

Jenny in the Orchard

The curtain discloses only the fore-part of a very dimly lit stage on which Mrs Arthur Cranleigh and Thomas Edenfold, entering from left and right respectively, appear as little more than shadows.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Is that you, Tom?

EDENFOLD. Of course: you know it is.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I'm dreaming, aren't I?

EDENFOLD. If you think so—yes.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Tom, you sound so old.

EDENFOLD. So do you.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Why have you brought me here?

EDENFOLD. I haven't. You came here.

MRS CRANLEIGH. But where are we?

EDENFOLD. That's for you to say. It's your dream, not mine.

[The lights come up slowly and we see that Mrs Cranleigh is an extremely beautiful woman. There is an air of tranquil happiness about her and a look of great kindness. She is as contented as it is possible for a normally intelligent woman to be, and she carries her forty years with effortless grace. Thomas Edenfold is forty-one. A man of medium build with a weather-beaten face and a somewhat satirical expression. With glasses and greying hair he looks every bit of his age. He wears grey flannel trousers and a sports jacket. Mrs Cranleigh is tastefully dressed for a summer day in the country. She is hatless, but carries a handbag.

MRS CRANLEIGH [*looking about her in surprise*]. Why, Tom, it looks like a theatre. It *is* a theatre!

[*Both characters are now in the centre, which is softly flooded with a warm light.*]

EDENFOLD. You always imagined yourself in a theatre, didn't you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. And the curtain's up. [*She peers into the auditorium.*] Well, thank heaven there's no one in front. Usually when I dream of being on the stage the house is packed with people, and I find I haven't learnt a word of my part and don't even know what we are playing. It's terrible.

EDENFOLD. Do you know what we are playing now?

MRS CRANLEIGH. We're not playing anything.

EDENFOLD. Oh, yes, we are. This is just the prologue. But you needn't worry: you know your part perfectly.

MRS CRANLEIGH. How can I know it? I've never even seen it.

EDENFOLD. Every word you are saying is exactly as I wrote it for you. And here are two chairs, you see, for the principal characters.

[*We see now that two small and unobtrusive chairs are standing in the centre before a closed traverse.*]

[*He places a chair for Mrs Cranleigh.*] Mrs Arthur Cranleigh.

[*He places one for himself on her right.*] Mr Thomas Edenfold.

[*They sit.*]

MRS CRANLEIGH. Oh, Tom, what *are* you talking about? I feel so stupid and muddled. I hate dreaming like this. Wake me up or explain to me, or something. Why am I here with you? You belong to years and years ago.

EDENFOLD. You were thinking about me, weren't you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. Was I? When? In what way?

EDENFOLD. You had just cut something out of the morning paper; a little—obituary notice.

MRS CRANLEIGH [*slowly*]. Why, yes—now I remember. Tom, I read that you were——

EDENFOLD. And now you see that I am not.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Yes, but that's only because I'm dreaming.

EDENFOLD. What does it matter? I've been dead to you these many years.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Tom——

EDENFOLD. Oh, yes, I have. And you've been dead to me, until recently.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Recently?

EDENFOLD. I started to write my autobiography; that brought you to life again.

MRS CRANLEIGH. And that's what that notice was about. I remember it all now. I was sitting on the couch in the drawing-room after tea. I was thinking about you and wishing—all sorts of things. I must have fallen asleep; and now, I suppose, I'm waking up again?

EDENFOLD. Oh, no, you're not. You've got a deuce of a lot to dream yet.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Tom, it's so lovely to be with you again, I ought not to want to wake up. But I have a feeling that I'm not going to like this dream.

EDENFOLD. You're not, my dear. You're not going to like it at all.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Well, it's something to know that I am dreaming—that I'm really on the couch in the drawing-room at home. And it can't be a very long dream because the telephone's just beside me, and my husband's ringing me from Town at half-past five. It must be nearly that now.

EDENFOLD. It may be quite that, but in the time it takes the sound of a bell to reach your waking ear you may dream a whole life away.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I truly hope I shan't. There's so much of it I couldn't bear again.

EDENFOLD. You won't have to. I am concerned only with Jenny in the Orchard.

MRS CRANLEIGH. How that takes me back! I'd almost forgotten you used to call me "Jenny in the Orchard."

EDENFOLD. It was always in the orchard that I saw you, and I never learnt your surname until the end of the second summer.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I was horrid to you, wasn't I, Tom?

EDENFOLD. You were.

MRS CRANLEIGH. But not always; there were the lovely times when . . .

EDENFOLD. Oh, of course, if you hadn't been adorable sometimes, you wouldn't have hurt so much.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Did I hurt you dreadfully?

EDENFOLD. Dreadfully—even more, I used to hope, than you had intended. One can be very badly hurt at fifteen, you know, but one can also get over it, though I'd have killed anyone who had told me that at the time.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Are you still angry with me?

" EDENFOLD. I don't think I ever was, but I can remember hoping that you were angry with yourself.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I was; but not angry enough. I didn't know that I was never to see you again. And when I read that notice in the paper . . .

EDENFOLD. You determined to have it out with yourself.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Yes, I suppose that was it.

EDENFOLD. To punish yourself for your treatment of me all those years ago. Well, since you're here, I'm afraid that's what you're going to do, though it's quite unnecessary, Jenny. In common with most girls you were cruel, and in common with most boys I was a fool. That's all. I've often laughed at myself when I've thought how I chose

to spend holiday after holiday with my dreary Uncle Edenfold just so that I could look at a little girl who lived with her grannie in a cottage at the foot of the hill; who gave me a hundred frowns for one smile, and who, when at last I got to know her, made me pay with a score of heart-breaks for a brace of magical evenings.

MRS CRANLEIGH. What an atrocious little beast I was! Yet I loved you, Tom. How I loved you! It nearly killed me when you went away.

EDENFOLD. It nearly killed me to go. Yet I remember little of all that now. It's the magical evenings that I remember. Time is kind to us in that way. When I began to write of you the other day I found the memory of those Hampshire holidays so refreshing that I couldn't imagine why I hadn't thought of them more often. Extreme youth can be agonizing, but the peculiar beauty that belongs to it has an early-morning quality, a fugitive freshness, Jenny, which can never be recaptured. It chases us when we are children, and in early youth it catches up with us. For a little while we run frantically, neck and neck, then it overtakes us and flies ahead. It leaves behind an earthly echo of itself, a tangible, afternoon beauty which we can anchor and cling to. But the miracle is over. Some of us can remember it, but only some of us. I can remember it.

MRS CRANLEIGH. So can I.

EDENFOLD. Of course: that's why you're here. You know, it pleases me to think that the last work I did was to write about you. It was like coming full circle and ending my life in the Hampshire paradise where it began. I've had a stormy passage, one way and another, but I enjoyed the last few weeks of it, living again in those far-off, foolish days when you were Jenny in the Orchard.

MRS CRANLEIGH. And you were Peeping Tom.

EDENFOLD. How I detested that title!

MRS CRANLEIGH. You earned it, you know.

EDENFOLD. I couldn't help looking at you, Jenny.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You told me you wanted to stare at me for ever.

EDENFOLD. So I did.

MRS CRANLEIGH. And what was I supposed to be doing, pray? Would you care to be stared at for ever?

EDENFOLD. You might have known I couldn't keep it up, though I must say you're still remarkably easy to look at, Jenny . . . in fact, if I hadn't just . . . [*He pauses.*] I mean, if you weren't . . . [*He pauses again.*] . . . Ah, well!

MRS CRANLEIGH. Thank you, Tom.

EDENFOLD. And remember, you gave me little chance to do anything but stare at you. You snubbed me almost every time I spoke to you: you snubbed me almost every time I came into the orchard.

MRS CRANLEIGH. And cried almost every time you left it.

EDENFOLD. How was I to know that?

MRS CRANLEIGH. Oh, Tom, darling, you were very stupid.

EDENFOLD. I suppose I must have been. And you were utterly merciless.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I know I was. But it seemed at the time that I couldn't help it. You were so dreadfully serious.

EDENFOLD. Youth is serious, and a boy can be very young at fifteen.

MRS CRANLEIGH. But I was younger still.

EDENFOLD. Nonsense, you were a girl, and no girl has ever been as young as I was at fifteen.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Do you remember the *Golden Treasury*, and how you taught me to love poetry? I was serious sometimes.

EDENFOLD. It was you who taught me to love poetry,

though you didn't know it. Do you remember the hay-loft?

MRS CRANLEIGH. The hay-loft—on the hill, above the mere. Tom, there might have been other evenings.

EDENFOLD. Yes. And this, I think, is where our play begins. [*The light fades.*] Forgive me, Jenny dear, we must clear the stage.

[They rise, and as the light is fading Edenfold takes the two chairs, and in the darkness they move to the prompt corner. Now the traverse opens, and the returning light discloses an orchard on a late summer evening. Two old and irregular apple-trees, laden with pale green fruit, are prominent in the foreground, one down left, the other up right. From these an old and frayed clothes-line supports some faded, yet colourful articles. A rough wooden seat, silver-grey with years of exposure, stands right of centre, close to the right-hand tree.]

[*As the scene is revealed*] Now do you know where you are?

MRS CRANLEIGH [*in an awed whisper*]. Tom—it's the orchard—— [*Then, louder*] It's home again! Tom, where are you? [*But he is gone.*] Tom—Tom——

[She is answered only by a very youthful echo of her own voice calling "Tom!—Tom!" and Jenny Heycroft runs into the orchard from the left. Jenny is fourteen, and her appearance need not be described in detail, so long as it is remembered that Tom wanted to stare at her for ever. Her hair is rather untidy, and her printed cotton frock, which might have fitted her a little better a year ago, is rather faded; but she is a work of art, and any attempt at improvement would be vandalism. Mrs Cranleigh, leaning against the proscenium arch, watches the scene.]

JENNY [*in the centre now, and calling out to right*]. Tom. Come back; I was only joking. I will come to-morrow, truly I will. [*She pauses, as if waiting for an answer.*] I know you're here somewhere—you're looking at me—spying on me. [*A pause.*] Tom, if you don't come now, I'm going indoors. [*A pause.*] And I won't come out to-morrow. [*A pause.*] Very well, then. Good-bye, Tom. [*She runs off left.*]

[*And Tom runs in from the right. He is fifteen, and, though he wears only flannel trousers and an open-neck shirt, there is something about his appearance which suggests immediately that his social sphere is altogether different from Jenny's, and that his Uncle Edenfold would strongly disapprove of his visits to the orchard if he knew of them. He is a romantic-looking boy, active and very earnest.*]

TOM. Jenny—— [*He sees that he is too late, and beats his fist into his palm with a stifled oath.*] Oh, da—!

[*He looks off left. Then he takes a small piece of paper from his pocket, unfolds it, and glances at it. At this point the voice of Jenny's grandmother calls from the distance, "Jenny, you won't forget to bring in those things from the line, will you? Before the dew gets on them." Jenny's voice answers "All right." From the line Tom seizes a clothes-peg, folds the paper again and pegs it up midway between the trees. Then, with a last glance out left, he runs off the way he came. Mrs Cranleigh now advances into the scene and deliberately, with an air of ownership, she takes the paper from the line, unfolds it, and reads in a voice which suggests that she already knows it by heart:*]

MRS CRANLEIGH.

In the evening, in the hay-loft, on the hill above the mere,
After sunset in the loft beneath the thatch,
I will whistle very softly so that only you can hear,
And very softly you will lift the latch.

Never talk above a whisper, Jenny, nobody must hear,
And nobody must see you come or go,
But a little blinded archer who will pilot you, my dear,
And guard the door because I love you so.

[For a moment she stands in thought. Then she replaces the paper, as she found it, on the line and walks quietly out to the right.]

[Jenny returns to collect the washing, and is just about to pull off the first peg, when she sees the paper, runs to centre, and takes it. She flops into a kneeling position, facing the audience, and begins to read to herself slowly and critically. Then she repeats:]

JENNY.

Nobody must see you come or go,
But a little blinded archer . . .

How can he see me if he's blind?

[She frowns and shakes her head, then she smiles, glances furtively out to the right, folds the paper rather tenderly, and tucks it in the neck of her frock. Now she rises and begins slowly to collect the washing, starting at the left. Her glance has told her that Tom is coming back, and she doesn't want to have her task finished before he arrives, which, in fact, he does just as she is coming to left-centre.]

TOM *[casually]*. Hullo, Jenny.

JENNY. Hullo!

[Tom sits on the ground, right-centre, under the clothes-line, plucks a blade of grass, and begins to nibble the stem. Jenny continues her work, making it last as long as possible.]

TOM. Well, here I am.

JENNY. So I see.

[A pause.]

TOM. I thought you wanted me.

JENNY. What should I want you for?

TOM. Well, you called me.

JENNY. That was ages ago.

TOM. Well, here I am.

JENNY. So I see.

[Which brings them back where they started. Tom makes a further effort.]

TOM. What's the matter with you, Jenny?

JENNY *[airily]*. Nothing.

TOM. Oh, Jenny, I wish you'd be nice like you were yesterday.

JENNY. I am nice.

TOM. You're not; you're deliberately being beastly.

JENNY *[still lightly]*. Well, if you don't like me you can go away again. I'm not stopping you.

TOM. Oh, Jenny—can't you be serious *some times*?

JENNY. You know I can, but not for ever. Anyway, why do you always want to be so *serious*?

TOM. Well, there's nothing else to do.

JENNY *[laughing now]*. Oh, Tom, you are so silly!

TOM. I can't help it—you make me silly.

[This very sullenly.]

JENNY. Poor old Tom.

TOM *[still nibbling his grass]*. You will come to-morrow, won't you, Jenny?

JENNY. Perhaps.

TOM. And bring the *Golden Treasury*?

JENNY. I haven't said I'm coming yet.

TOM. Oh, Jenny, for heaven's sake! What is the matter with you? *[She dances round to Tom's right, humming a gay little tune, and unpegs the last garment from the line. Tom, still sitting, tries to take her hand, but she evades him.]* Jenny—
[This is an entreaty.]

JENNY. I must take these things in now.

TOM. Please, Jenny—

[But she shakes her head, and dances away to the left, what time she sings quietly and prettily, though most regrettably:]

JENNY.

I'll tell my mother when I get home
 The boys won't leave the girls alone,
 La—la la—la la la—la—la—la— etc.



[There is a gleam of native artistry in Jenny which enables her to lift this outrageous little performance entirely out of the realms of vulgarity and make it exquisite. Her lovely unstudied movements and the quiet clarity of her voice combine to torture Tom, who stands and faces her, angry and wretched.]

TOM. I left something for you on the line, Jenny.

JENNY. Did you?

TOM. I want it back, please. I know you found it.

JENNY. Peeping Tom.

TOM. Give it me. *[He moves towards her.]* Come on.
Give it me. *[He is losing control.]*

JENNY. Don't shout at me.

TOM. Then give it me.

JENNY. Suppose I haven't got it.

TOM. You have got it—you know you have—unless you've torn it up. Jenny, you haven't torn it up?

JENNY. Haven't I?

TOM. *Have you, Jenny?*

JENNY. I'm not going to be shouted at, and I must go in now—good-bye—— *[And she runs off.]*

TOM. Oh——! *[With an effort he stifles another oath, braces himself, and calls after her]* All right, then, Jenny—you needn't come to-morrow. I shan't be there, anyway. *[He swings round and strides off to the right, where he hesitates a moment, turns, and calls]* Good-bye, Jenny.

[He goes. There is a pause, and then a rather shame-faced Jenny comes cautiously back. She looks for Tom, but he is gone as fast as his legs will carry him. She moves to centre, gazing out right, and is met by Mrs Cranleigh, who walks quietly up to her.]

MRS CRANLEIGH. It's too late, Jenny; he's gone.

JENNY. Who are you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. You don't recognize me?

JENNY. No, but—you remind me of my mother.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Yes, I get more like her as I grow older. I can see her every time I look in the glass.

JENNY. Did you know her?

MRS CRANLEIGH. She was my mother, too, Jenny.

JENNY. What do you mean? Who are you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. I'm Mrs Arthur Cranleigh. I was Jenny Heycroft.

JENNY. But I'm Jenny Heycroft.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I know. Sit here and talk to me.

JENNY. I—I think I ought to go.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You can't go, Jenny: you can't run away from yourself. Now, sit here.

[She indicates the seat under the tree and sits, right.]

JENNY [*hesitating*]. But Tom——

MRS CRANLEIGH. Tom's gone, and he won't come back this time. I know all about you, you see.

JENNY. He will come back; and—[*she sits on Mrs Cranleigh's left*] how can you know all about me?

MRS CRANLEIGH [*slowly*]. Because you are my past.

JENNY. I don't understand—— I don't know you.

MRS CRANLEIGH. We never know the future. A quarter of a century lies between us, but we are both the same Jenny.

JENNY. We can't be. You're Mrs Cranleigh; you just said you were, and I shall never be Mrs Cranleigh.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Oh, yes, you will.

JENNY. I won't. I'm going to marry Tom.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You'll never see Tom again.

JENNY. Stop saying that; I don't believe you. I don't believe a word you say.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I have my credentials. [*She opens her bag and takes from it a small paper, which she unfolds carefully as it is very old and worn.*] Will this convince you?

JENNY [*taking the paper and reading, bewildered*].

In the evening, in the hay-loft, on the hill above the mere——

But this is——

MRS CRANLEIGH. Yes. I've kept it, you see, all these years. Foolish of me, perhaps, but I couldn't let it go.

JENNY. But Tom's just left it for me. It's here—— [*She produces her own.*] Look!

MRS CRANLEIGH. Only one of those is real—my one. [*She takes it and replaces it in her bag.*] But you don't believe me yet, I can see.

JENNY. How can I believe you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. Then listen. You want to go to Tom,

don't you? Well, that's just what I want you to do. But you won't go—you can't go.

JENNY. I can, I will—I—— [*But she doesn't move.*] No. I can't go. You're stopping me.

MRS CRANLEIGH. No, Jenny, you're stopping yourself.

JENNY. Oh, please explain to me. Why can't I go? And how can you have Tom's poem as well as me?

MRS CRANLEIGH. I found it on the clothes-line—I've had it ever since.

JENNY. But so have I.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Yours is only imaginary.

JENNY. How can it be? *It's here . . .*

MRS CRANLEIGH. Because you are only imaginary—just a part of a silly dream I am having. I wish I could wake.

JENNY. I'm not imaginary, and I think you're mad. [*She folds her paper, tucks it back in her dress, and rises.*] Anyway, you shan't prevent me from going to Tom. I'm going to him now.

MRS CRANLEIGH. How I wish you could!

JENNY [*sitting again*]. Please let me go.

MRS CRANLEIGH. I can't.

JENNY. Why can't you?

MRS CRANLEIGH. Because you won't let yourself; because you can only do as I did, and I did not go to Tom.

JENNY. Then you should have gone to him. It was wicked of you not to go.

MRS CRANLEIGH. No, it was wicked of you; it was fiendish of you, and I've never forgiven you.

JENNY. But you said——

MRS CRANLEIGH. Remember, it wasn't Jenny Cranleigh who treated him like that, but little Jenny Heycroft long ago. Again and again you hurt him deliberately, and at last you hurt him too much, and he went away because he

thought you'd torn up his little rhyme. But you didn't hurt him, Jenny, nearly so badly as you hurt yourself. He never came back.

JENNY. But he's only just gone.

MRS CRANLEIGH. In a dream "only just" may be any length of time.

JENNY. But it's not five minutes ago——

MRS CRANLEIGH. It's twenty-six years ago.

JENNY. Oh, you frighten me. What are you trying to tell me? What is happening to me? Why have you come here?

MRS CRANLEIGH. It was because of something I read in the paper. I had to come—"to have it out with myself," he said—"to punish myself for my treatment of him all those years ago." Yes, that was it, to punish myself—[*angrily*] to punish *you*, Jenny.

JENNY. But I haven't done you any harm.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You've given me years of unhappiness, and ruined what might have been the loveliest part of my life—and you say you haven't done me any harm.

JENNY. How can I have done you any harm when I've never seen you before? Why are you being so angry with me?

MRS CRANLEIGH. Little fool! I'm being angry with myself. Don't you realize now that you're nothing but a projection of my mind—a guilty thought that has come to plague me.

JENNY. I didn't come to plague you. [*She gets up, and moves a pace or two to the left, then turns and faces Mrs Cranleigh.*] You came to me, you know you did. I was happy enough before you came.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Was Tom happy enough?

JENNY. Oh, do stop! [*She sits on the ground at Mrs Cranleigh's feet.*] I didn't meant to hurt him so; I didn't

understand. And if you know all about me, you must know that I didn't.

MRS CRANLEIGH. But you are going to understand.

JENNY. You're being cruel.

MRS CRANLEIGH. That's why I'm here.

JENNY. You don't look like a cruel person.

MRS CRANLEIGH. The kindest people may be brutal to themselves, and they very often are. If I'd been a little more brutal to you in the past, perhaps I shouldn't have been sent here now. But I was too consumed with pity for you—until I grew to despise you. Then I tried to forget you, and for a long time I succeeded. I don't often think of Jenny in the Orchard now, and when I do it is without affection. [*Jenny gives a little sob.*] Does that surprise you? Oh, I think with deep affection of the orchard, I assure you, and of Grannie and of Tom and of the youth and the beauty which Jenny so abused. But of Jenny herself—of you—I think only with a mixture of anger and pity and contempt.

JENNY. Oh, stop——

MRS CRANLEIGH. I won't stop. You've got to know what you have done, you've got to know what lies ahead.

JENNY. I don't care what lies ahead if only Tom will come back. *Please* say he'll come back.

MRS CRANLEIGH. He'll never come back, and later on you won't even care whether he comes or not.

JENNY. How can you say that? I'll always care, you know I will. I don't care about anything else in the world, and that's true—honestly it's true.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Oh, it's true enough now. But I have more to tell you yet.

JENNY. Don't tell me any more—I don't want to know any more.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You must.

JENNY. Please. I'm so dreadfully unhappy. I can't bear any more. Whatever I've done, I'll put it right if only you'll tell me how.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Done is done for ever—there's no putting it right.

JENNY. Then what is to happen to me?

MRS CRANLEIGH. You will be very unhappy for what will seem a very long time. You will go again to the hay-loft to-morrow and take the *Golden Treasury* with you, but Tom won't be there. You will linger in the orchard evening after evening, hoping, despairing, and hoping again, but he won't come. At last you will know that his holidays are over and he is gone. When the apples are gathered and the leaves are fallen and the evenings are damp and heavy with the scent of autumn fires you will feel unutterably lonely. The winter will seem like an eternity. Then Easter holidays and summer holidays will come and go, but there will be no Tom. Just you and Grannie, until you are eighteen. Then Grannie will die, and you will never be Jenny in the Orchard again. You will go to London and live with your Aunt Bertha at Finchley, and you will go on the stage, as you've always wanted to do. You won't be a great success, but your pretty face will ensure that you are never out of work, and you will meet people. When you are nineteen you will meet a particular person who will put all thoughts of Tom completely out of your mind. I won't tell you his name, for I cannot bear to pronounce it, but your friendship with him will be your crowning folly, and the next four years hold more unhappiness for you than any girl should ever be called on to bear. But you will bear it, somehow, and at last you will be rid of him. When you are twenty-four you will meet a barrister named Arthur Cranleigh, fifteen years older than you and, perhaps, a little pompous, but very charming and very kind; and very persuasive, as

a barrister should be, and when you are twenty-five he will persuade you to marry him.

[During this speech the daylight fades and the orchard is flooded with a sunset glow.]

JENNY. Never—I would rather die.

MRS CRANLEIGH. You can't even die, Jenny, because I didn't.

JENNY. Oh, don't—*don't* torture me any more.

MRS CRANLEIGH. Only a little more now. I told you I was here because of something I had read in the paper; *[she opens her bag and takes from it a small cutting]* this is what I read: *[she reads]* "The death is announced of Thomas Edenfold, the novelist and playwright, at the early age of forty-one. Mr Edenfold, who died at his Hampstead home, was engaged on an autobiographical work when he collapsed at his desk early yesterday. He leaves a widow and a daughter—Jenny."

JENNY. Then I have no hope—

MRS CRANLEIGH *[kindly now]*. Yes, you have. Look at me. Do I look so very wretched? I am what is called a happy woman, which is more than most women can say, and, maybe, far more than I deserve. I have an affectionate and successful husband, and I'm very fond of him. I have three lovely children, an adorable home, a great love of life, and much to look forward to. We can survive almost anything, you see, so long as we don't know of it beforehand.

JENNY. But I do know now, and I don't want to survive. Oh, I can't, I can't bear it.

[She is utterly broken. For a moment Mrs Cranleigh looks at her, then she nods as though to assure herself that her work is done. She rises and kneels beside Jenny, putting an arm about her.]

MRS CRANLEIGH. It's all right, Jenny. You have no more to bear, because I've borne it all for you. You will

cry yourself to sleep now—out here in the orchard—and a telephone will wake you—[*she rises*] in twenty-six years.

[*Mrs Cranleigh is gone, and already we are aware of a telephone bell, very faint and far away. The light is fading fast, and for a few seconds Jenny remains on the ground, crying helplessly. Then she rises to her knees, looking out to the right.*

JENNY. Tom—Tom—— Oh, do come back. She's gone now, Tom. Perhaps she was never here at all—perhaps it was I who was dreaming. Oh, Tom, I'll never be horrid to you again, I swear I won't, if only you'll come back. I don't want anyone or anything but you, and I'll never marry a pompous old barrister—I won't—I won't—I won't——

[*She collapses on the ground, and, as the light fades altogether, her sobs mingle with the sound of the telephone bell, in which they are eventually drowned as it grows nearer, louder, and more insistent, until the suddenly returning light reveals a dropped curtain and we are awake again.*

CURTAIN

I will Arise!

By T. B. Morris

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CHARACTERS

PROLOGUE

FIRST CITIZEN

SECOND CITIZEN

THIRD CITIZEN

OTHER CITIZENS

} *the modern half of the Chorus*

LUCIFER, *the Dark Angel*

MICHAEL, *the White Angel*

FIRST PILGRIM

SECOND PILGRIM

THIRD PILGRIM

OTHER PILGRIMS

} *the medieval half of the Chorus*

THE ARCHITECT

THE YOUNG WOMAN

THE YOUNG MAN

Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should be addressed to Frederick Muller, Ltd, 29 Great James Street, London, W.C.1, who publish the play in an acting edition and also in a volume entitled "Six One-Act Plays by T. B. Morris"

NOTES ON SETTING AND PRODUCTION

FOR the purpose of stage direction the setting is imagined as follows, though it may be adapted to any circumstances. Varying stage levels are advisable for effective grouping. A wall or curtain rises at the back of the stage, and against it centrally is an altar, behind which is a great wooden cross, which has fallen and is resting obliquely on one of its arms. This is the highest level; if possible, steps lead down from it to the next level, the main stage. A still lower level, with steps leading up to the main stage, will greatly help in Chorus movements. If platforms or steps are not available, rostra and blocks of masonry should be used to raise the principal characters. Broken pillars and arches may soar above the heads of the players, though these may be left to the imagination helped by the text. If it is desired to add colour to the setting, a large banner or hanging may droop across the back wall as if half fallen from its original position, or a broken window still containing coloured glass may appear above the altar.

Entrances right and left up-stage, or in the back wall, for Michael and Lucifer. Further entrances right and left down-stage for the other characters, if preferred, though it will be most effective if they can enter from the front through the audience.

Dramatic production in or near a church imposes a certain restraint upon action, and what there is must be stylized. Reverence and dignity are essential keynotes, and every movement and gesture must be made with these facts in mind. Yet there must be nothing either stodgy or sanctimonious in such a production, and, where it is necessary for characters to express evil, levity, or humour, some

relaxation to this end of the general tone must be permitted to provide that contrast without which no drama can live. Something of the ballet, however restrained, should enter into the movements of the characters in this play. The groups of the Chorus must be deliberately posed to a statuesque stillness, yet must be fluid and frequently changed to accord with the moods of the play, all groups being built up with a view to obtaining the greatest pictorial effect, and movement changes rehearsed to a synchronized perfection. If the performance takes place in daylight, and therefore without the considerable aid of stage lighting, special attention is necessary to make-up and to getting all possible advantage out of colour, variation of grouping, and background music. Any previously known conditions of light and shadow in a building should be borne in mind in planning the grouping and movement of characters where stage lighting is not used. The essential quality of attack in ordinary stage productions is even more essential here. Nothing must be allowed to drag. Verse, even of a mournful and introspective nature, must be attacked and moved along, as well as kept vital by constantly changing levels. The verse in this piece is varied in metre to assist to this end. I have broken up the Chorus lines in places for six individual speakers. This is because a single voice is clearer and more effective than several together, and the change of solo speakers provides constant lift. Where lines are set for half or the whole of the Chorus to speak together, they must be rehearsed until they can be spoken without that raggedness which often mars choral verse. All players must be vital throughout, and this should be remembered all the time by those who have to remain still for longish periods without speech. They must keep their attention alive upon the other players where directed, and, by remaining still except for the stylized reactions directed by the Producer, always

make their full contribution to the stage picture as a whole. There must be no undirected movement or gesture in any of the players.

Michael and Lucifer, though contrasted in appearance (preferably a fair Michael and dark Lucifer), should both be tall and beautiful. Great wings of conventionalized shape will, of course, improve their appearance, but, even if these are obtainable, it may be found impossible to use them, unless the players are far more static than is here directed. In this case they should rely for their appearance on robes of rich and heavy material (together with armour if desired) and on their bearing. Michael's robes (and armour) should be white and silver or gold, Lucifer's red and black. If it cannot be arranged to fill these parts with players taller than the rest, they should occupy as often as possible heights above the other players.

The Architect should wear late fourteenth-century costume, the Pilgrims early fifteenth-century, the latter being considerably varied as to rank if there are a number of them. It will be observed that the first three Pilgrims have been given something of individuality, while the first three Citizens have not, and may therefore be cast at pleasure. The Young Woman and Young Man are quite simple, ordinary people, and they might most effectively be dressed in military and Air Force uniform. It does not matter which wears which, but they should not be above junior-officer rank. No head-dresses, of course, will be worn by men of any period. While it would be proper for the Pilgrims to cross themselves in the Cathedral, this action may be omitted if circumstances make the omission desirable. The dress of the Citizens may be modern, or of some fantastic 'timeless' style.

The Pilgrims and Citizens may be groups of any convenient number of men and women and young people,

The largest available number that may effectively be grouped should be used, even though some of them remain silent.

A study of ballet stills will be of great value in working out the varied grouping and poses of the Chorus, especially in the stylized use of arms.

T. B. M.

I will Arise!

PROLOGUE

This, if desired, may be spoken by the Architect before he changes into his medieval costume.

Lend your imagination, now, that we
May set our scene. Here is a wreck of stone
Where once great beauty burned. All overthrown
Lies the high cross; the antique tracery
Of carven wood and gilding, gone. And see
How empty gape the windows. Toward the vault
Of a quiet Heaven the broken pillars halt
Like prayers of men who pray but dolefully.

Lend more than your imagination. You
In this dark ruin have, with us, your part.
Shattered cathedral, devastated heart,
What are they but the same? There goodness grew
Where now is desolation. Not alone
Come they who mourn, for you with them are one.

[Music—a solemn march or lament—begins as the Prologue ends. The Citizens enter slowly, with bowed heads, either through the audience or else somewhere down-stage, and group themselves on the lowest level of the stage in attitudes of mourning. Some are kneeling, some crouching, some standing with bowed heads. The music stops.]

FIRST CITIZEN. To a dark place we have come
And in a dark hour——

CITIZENS. To a ruined cathedral, symbolizing the ruin of ourselves; of our lives and hopes,
The ruin of our world.

FIRST CITIZEN. Out of a dark place we make our prayer—

SECOND CITIZEN. Or what passes with us for prayer—

FIRST CITIZEN. But who—now—shall hear us?

SECOND CITIZEN. Who—now—shall give heed to us,
Who are born under a bitter star?

THIRD CITIZEN. Who is there now to hear us?

FIRST CITIZEN. Are there ears toward the voices that
mourn;

Mourn the passing of good,

Of good from ourselves, of good from the world of man?

SECOND CITIZEN. We mourn the passing of good,
Yet we have let it pass with little hindrance—

THIRD CITIZEN. We who have shrivelled our souls in
the pleasure and pain of worldly things
And so come to desolation.

CITIZENS. Our souls are withered; our souls are driven
like withered leaves in the winds of Hell.
For, though we have not forgotten that we ought to pray,
We have lost the power and the direction of the prayer.
We have lost faith in prayer.

*[The Citizens rise and lift their heads. The voices of the
speakers lift and become more rapid and urgent,
each following quickly upon the other.]*

FIRST CITIZEN. Not always have we known this darkness
and pain.
We have had youth and joy—joy in the wine of our blood
And joy in the urge of creation; the gold of the morning
When hope was a loved playmate—

SECOND CITIZEN. This we have known of promise
And warmed to the goal of achievement, seeing ourselves

As those who lift and soar up and over the common things
Into a broad perfection——

FIRST CITIZEN.

Out and up

Into the wider blue of the infinite space
Light-decked with myriad worlds——

THIRD CITIZEN.

Out and up and beyond

The little bonds of existence——

FIRST CITIZEN.

Into the gaze of God!

CITIZENS. This we have known of promise.

This we have learned to read of the purpose of God;
The purpose of God toward man, writ fair in the eyes of
God. [*They return to their attitudes of mourning.*]

FIRST CITIZEN. But what shall become of us now,
Who, seeing the light, have chosen the dark again and
again?

THIRD CITIZEN. Who have fallen into the ultimate sin,
the loss of our faith.

SECOND CITIZEN. Who suffer the ultimate punishment,
loss of all hope.

THIRD CITIZEN. We have turned our eyes from the
purpose of God for all men
To the baser purpose of every man for himself.

FIRST CITIZEN. And so we are come to the dark. Our
words are arrows
Sped toward nothing, falling back on ourselves.

CITIZENS. Sped toward nothing—nothing.

[*A roll of thunder, or brief burst of discordant music.*
Lucifer bounds on up-stage left, with his drawn
sword in his hand.]

LUCIFER [*in a great voice, terribly*]. Chaos! Will God
create again a world out of chaos? [*He spreads his arms wide,*
indicating the ruin about him. More thunder.] See what I have
done to your world! I am Lucifer, lord of your broken
world! Civilization is broken to bits! War! Pestilence!

Famine! The Devil comes into his own! [*Lucifer laughs hugely and moves down-stage. The Citizens, who have shrunk back from him with a concerted gasp of fear, start back farther as he menaces them. Then he laughs again, changes his tone to one of cynical tolerance, and addresses them more intimately.*] I invented a very nice line in sins—seven deadly ones and lots of others—oho, lots of little others! And you took to them all and made some more for yourselves. You've done the work of Hell very nicely—very nicely, thank you! And now the world is shattered! Humanity is done! Chaos has come again! [*Lucifer regards the Citizens, enjoying their fear. Michael enters quietly up-stage right and stands on the highest level, to the right of the altar. He wears a sheathed sword, but his hands are bound before him with a scarlet band. Lucifer, who has not seen Michael, goes on talking to the Citizens, now in quite a friendly tone.*] But don't let me frighten you. There's no need for alarm. Chaos is a comfortable state of muddle—if you look at it that way—and the muddle-headed world will love it. And don't worry about loss of faith. You don't need faith. You've only to obey me.

MICHAEL [*in a ringing, beautiful voice*]. Lucifer!

[*Lucifer starts round with a hiss of fear, half-crouching, his sword ready against attack. Then he sees that Michael is bound, and laughs. The Citizens also start round to face Michael, wondering.*

LUCIFER [*amused*]. How now, Michael! How do you like your bondage—ha?

[*Lucifer moves up towards Michael, still in a half-crouching attitude, as though about to spring at him, but Michael remains straight and still.*

MICHAEL [*calmly*]. I see
You have forgot that day in the world's dawning
When, from the ultimate pinnacle of Heaven
I threw you down. [*Lucifer shrinks back a little.*

You have forgotten

How all the sons of morning drove your hosts
Athwart the firmament, and cast you out
From star and further star, through dizzy ages
Of light and vast cerulean space, until
We'd rid the heavens of pride.

LUCIFER [*recovering, straightening himself, challenging*].

My pride! Ay, pride

Such as you'd have, could you dare stand for yourselves
And outface God, as I did. [*Proudly*] Lucifer!
Erstwhile son of the morning. Lord of night!
Lord of mine own dominion! Better state
Than mopping and mowing at the Throne of Grace
As you do, Michael.

MICHAEL [*terribly*]. There is no Throne of Grace
For you and those who fell with you. It is written
That we shall strive again——

LUCIFER. Then loose your hands,
You whom the sins of earth have bound.

[*Lucifer springs near Michael to menace him with his sword, but Michael faces him calmly, and again Lucifer shrinks back.*]

MICHAEL. My bondage
Is irksome, no denying. An archangel
Not gladly suffers this indignity.
Yet it is written that we shall strive again
And I shall bind you for a thousand years.

LUCIFER. Written where? In Heaven? But the fair page
of Heaven
Was ever marred on earth. The earth is mine
And all that therein is. The people of earth
Are mine—all, all! And I have made them gifts—
War! Pestilence! Famine! Doubt and desolation!
Look how they dote on me!

[He indicates the Citizens, who have been watching with concerted reactions of hope and fear. Michael moves towards them.]

MICHAEL. People of earth,
You have broken the wings of prayer, and, without faith,
How can you dare aspire to the ear of God?

CITIZENS [*murmuring*]. Blessed St Michael—hear us, help us!

MICHAEL. Be of good courage!
God is for ever merciful. He bade me
Come to your aid.

[Holding out his bound hands] But I am bound by sin—
By your sin. Look! Turn from your sin toward faith
And loose my hands. There is work for me——

[The Citizens make a timid concerted movement towards Michael, but Lucifer springs between them and Michael, driving them back in huddled fear with a great sweep of his sword.]

LUCIFER. Do not dare!
Back to your darkness!

MICHAEL. Stand, you doubtful ones!
Take faith and stand firm, that you may loose my bonds
And I may strike the darkness out from the light
For ever!

[But the Citizens, menaced by Lucifer, crouch in fear. Lucifer laughs.]

LUCIFER. Ah! See how they heed you, Michael.
They love my pretty toys.

[Lucifer, contemptuous though watchful, draws back a little towards the left, leaving the stage to Michael.]

CITIZENS. What shall we do?
Alas! what shall we do? Where is redemption
For such as we are?

MICHAEL. Redemption is never far beyond repentance,

For God is merciful to men and sparrows.
 But not repentance only shall direct you
 To mercy. There is more required of you :
 Courage of each to take firm hold again
 On faith and hope ; to face again the skull
 Whose hollow eyes glare dread on Golgotha
 And look beyond, to the calm gaze of God.

FIRST CITIZEN. But we have courage.

SECOND CITIZEN. We have proved our courage.

THIRD CITIZEN. What generation of men has better
 proof?

MICHAEL. The sons of men were never strange to
 courage

Of earthly sort, and you have borne yourselves
 As men indeed, and paragons, in these days
 When the earth trembles and faints in the empty travail
 Of a lesser Armageddon. You have given your sons a song.
 What you have done shall be loud in the song of earth
 While ever a spark of earth remains ; till the tongue and
 the brain and the heart

Of the last man shall fade. . . . But this is courage
 Not unalloyed. There is dross in the gold, and the peril
 And fire have not purged it all. I would give you courage
 Where the red heart has made a crucible
 For living and pure gold.

CITIZENS [*despairing*]. Oh ! What shall avail
 Of courage of common folk, the men in the street ?

SECOND CITIZEN. We are no lords and leaders of men
 who may do great things
 Of good and ill——

THIRD CITIZEN. And blaze the illuminations
 On history's parchment pages——

FIRST CITIZEN. Even in travail we are the common men
 of the street ;

The common women of the hearth and home,
Having no great names——

MICHAEL [*gently*]. Was *His* so great a name—
Jesus the son of Joseph, carpenter
Of Nazareth—until He made it so?

LUCIFER [*sneering*]. His faith has left His church. His
church is ruined.

MICHAEL [*sternly*]. Were every stone from every stone
o'eturned,

Yet would the prayers that hallow all this place,
The faith of those who built to the glory of God,
The songs of all who sang to the praise of God,
The cares of all who brought their cares to God
Through all the centuries, from dark age to dark age,
Preserve it whole and perfect in His eyes.

[*To the Citizens.*

Listen! Can you not hear their voices;
Voices that sang, five centuries ago,
In a simple and perfect faith?

[*Michael has lifted his head and stands listening. Fade in the music of a medieval chant, or, if preferred, unaccompanied voices singing an old hymn or a psalm (perhaps "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills"), very softly for a moment, as if over a great distance of time. The Citizens rise and group together to one side of the lowest platform, the side opposite that which the Pilgrims will occupy, listening, interested, momentarily hopeful. Then the music grows louder and/or voices are definitely heard. The Pilgrims enter the building by the main entrance, and move in procession, singing still if they are to sing, through the audience and up to the lowest platform, where they group opposite the Citizens. If desired, quite a large procession may be formed,*

and they may carry a banner or two for greater pictorial effect (but there should not be too many of them for effective handling in the space available). If there are only a few of them, they enter as a group and not as a procession. They do not see the Citizens, nor are they aware of the ruin of the cathedral, because they are as yet in the past. Michael and Lucifer are still invisible to them. Michael moves up to the highest platform and stands to the right of the altar. Lucifer remains well over to the left of the middle platform, watching with some uneasiness. The Pilgrims remain in a group on the lowest platform until they have finished their singing and the following lines.

FIRST CITIZEN [*awed*]. They do not see us. They do not see the angels.

SECOND CITIZEN. Yet we see them. What a marvel is this?

THIRD CITIZEN. They are here in the past—five hundred years ago.

FIRST PILGRIM [*a dignified old man, looking about him*]. Well, here we are, my friends, at the end of our pilgrimage, and this is the cathedral.

SECOND PILGRIM [*a plump and garrulous woman*]. It is a fine building indeed, and must have cost a pretty penny. But no doubt there will be wondrous cures and miracles done here. God and St Michael will bless these walls, you may depend upon that!

THIRD PILGRIM [*a young girl*]. It is beautiful! God and His holy saints must surely love to dwell in such a house.

SECOND PILGRIM [*her tongue not stilled by her surroundings, but her heart good*]. I wonder if my Thomas is even now cured of the humours of his joints? 'Twas for that—for

one thing—I came, though 'a will take a gallon of ale to's breakfast—for all I can say, and that's much—and I don't doubt his joints suffer from his habits. Ah, me! the good St Michael will have hard work to cure Thomas.

LUCIFER [*mocking, to Michael*]. New work for you, Michael. Don't stand here idle. Speed you and cure Thomas. [*No one takes any notice of this.*]

SECOND PILGRIM. And there's Gaffer Woodrow's mule. The Devil's in the beast. [*Lucifer chuckles, but again no one takes any notice.*] Poor Gaffer says t' me ere I left: "Gossip Bounce," he says, "for the love of God, put up a prayer for the quieting o' my pestilent beast," he says; "'tis more than mortal man may do, an' I be sorely kicked and sore withal."

THIRD PILGRIM. But— isn't it strange to bring such a thing to God—a mule, I mean?

FIRST PILGRIM. We may bring all our cares to God, whether our own ills, or the ills of the weather, the crops, the beasts. God understands. God made mules as well as men.

SECOND PILGRIM. And 'tis very certain that, if I bring not the mule to God in my prayers, no one will get 'n anywhere else, for not one step will the creature move unless it sorts with his liking.

THIRD PILGRIM. I came first to see the wonder of the cathedral, and I shall pray here my ordinary prayers.

SECOND PILGRIM [*teasing*]. For a good man, a home, and a pair o' children, I doubt not. That's ever a maid's prayer. [*Confidentially*] Pray not for more than two little ones, my dear. They be generally given in greater abundance than we poor women can properly do wi'.

[*Sniggers from some of the other Pilgrims. The Third Pilgrim is confused.*]

FIRST PILGRIM [*to Second Pilgrim*]. Gossip Bounce,

you're a good woman and a good neighbour, as all know. But your tongue's too long—and this is church.

SECOND PILGRIM. And where more than in church should a body speak her mind, so be she speaks truth?

FIRST PILGRIM [*thoughtfully*]. Aye, 'tis in the little things of our lives God should be, as well as the great. But let's to our prayers, not forgetting those who would have come with us but lacked the time or the money.

SECOND PILGRIM. I've a-many to remember, s' many as Carrier when he do go to town. And they must travel in my poor head, for I'm no gentlewoman wi' the gifts o' writing, nor scholard t' read it.

[She begins to count on her fingers in some agitation, muttering to herself. The other Pilgrims move up to the steps before the altar and kneel in a line, while she is still feverishly trying to remember all for whom she has prayers to make.]

LUCIFER [*chuckling*]. Look at the old gossip. I'll go and whisper a naughty thought into her ear.

[He moves towards the Second Pilgrim, but Michael moves swiftly between them.]

MICHAEL. Back, Lucifer! She is on God's work.

LUCIFER [*falling back, sneering*]. Then God chooses peculiar agents.

MICHAEL [*coldly*]. That has always been a habit of His.

[The Second Pilgrim realizes that she is standing alone, gasps, and darts up to the others, plumping down on her knees in a vacant place.]

FIRST CITIZEN [*awed*]. Can they not see the ruin of this place? •

THIRD CITIZEN. They are in the past, I tell you.

SECOND CITIZEN. They had faith.

They brought their ills, little and big, to God,
In the sure knowledge that God would hear them, heal them.

CITIZENS. They knew that God would hear. They had never a doubt.

FIRST CITIZEN. But we are oppressed, we are afflicted with a heavy burden,

Losing the consciousness of God——

SECOND CITIZEN. Yet keeping the knowledge of our sin.

FIRST CITIZEN. For we are sophisticated, no longer simple as they.

The machine age, the progress of civilization——

THIRD CITIZEN. If we may call it progress——

FIRST CITIZEN. Have done this to us.

SECOND CITIZEN. And now there is none to help us, Who cannot help ourselves.

CITIZENS. Who cannot help ourselves.

LUCIFER [*to the Citizens, easily*]. Do not be over-impressed by this peep-show of the past. You can see a better show at the cinema, any week. And don't be taken in by their apparent piety. They were no better than you are. The only difference is that you have stopped pretending to yourselves. Only children pretend now.

[*Michael makes another appeal to the Citizens.*]

MICHAEL. Do not mistake reality for pretence,
Or, turning to the candle, leave the sun.
Have you no hearts more to lift in worship and peril?
No eyes to see the sweeping wings of angels
Ever about you? nor any ears to hear
The music of the stars chanting together
And all the sons of God singing for joy? . . .
They sing yet as they sang on that one day
When God the Architect laid in the keystone
Of His great arch that spans the universe,
Holding the spaces of the firmament,
And said: "It is done, and it is very good!"

LUCIFER [*laughing*]. Your theme is threadbare, Michael.

They have forgot

Such antique miracles as the Creation.

They know that male and female were created

(They found that out for themselves), but 'tis no more

Than theme for magazine tale and celluloid—

They call it love. If you'll be advised by me,

You'll tackle them with something up-to-date:

The miracle of the great four-engined bomber

(One of my choicest angels), or the atom

Unleashed, bringing my latest mode in death,

The poetry of complex mechanism,

Or the complexity of politics.

Stir up your ideas, Michael——

MICHAEL [*scornfully*].

Get you behind me!

You who teach fools to sneer, and light the cackle

Of the laughter of madmen after baubles. I,

With the help of God, shall yet prevail against you.

CITIZENS [*reviving a little*]. Is it possible

That we have begun to see again the gleam of truth

Living beyond the greater glare of the lie?

FIRST CITIZEN. Is it possible

That these good people, out of their past, can show us

That faith lives, however fitfully?

LUCIFER.

No!

That lantern has gone out.

MICHAEL.

There is a light in darkness,

However your minds as yet fall back from knowledge,

For everything is possible to God.

• [*The Pilgrims rise from their knees.*]

FIRST PILGRIM. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
From whence cometh my help.

PILGRIMS. My help cometh even from the Lord,
Who hath made Heaven and earth.

THIRD CITIZEN. It is a beautiful thing to have a faith like that.

SECOND CITIZEN. To have it, too, for every moment of one's workaday life.

FIRST CITIZEN. With such a faith, we could rebuild the world.

LUCIFER [*angrily*]. This has gone on long enough. [*To the Citizens*] I tell you these people are common clay, weak as you are. They prattle like children who have never seen reality. I will show you how much their faith is worth. [*He moves swiftly up-stage to the highest level, standing between the Pilgrims and the altar.*] Pilgrims! You can't have God without me. Behold!

[*The Pilgrims see him, gasp, and shrink back in horror.*]

SECOND PILGRIM. Why, 'tis the Devil, for all a's in his Sunday best.

FIRST PILGRIM. Lucifer! Here at the very altar?

THIRD PILGRIM. Here among prayer and beauty built for God?

PILGRIMS [*horrified*]. Are our prayers lacking in strength? . . .

If we cannot avoid the Devil,
How shall we reach God?

LUCIFER [*terribly*]. I am among you, you fools who think that your ills and ailments, your wars and the fears of hunger and death that are always upon you, shall be cured by a mere pilgrimage to a place made of wood and stones.

MICHAEL. A place hallowed by prayer.

LUCIFER [*to the Pilgrims*]. Look at the cross! You think it strong and upright—but look again. *

[*Lucifer makes a sweeping gesture towards the cross. The Pilgrims look and are dismayed.*]

PILGRIMS [*horrified*]. The cross has fallen! Who has dared to overthrow the cross?

FIRST PILGRIM [*to Lucifer*]. You are the enemy! You have done this!

LUCIFER. And God has not been able to prevent me. [*He makes gestures about and upward.*] Look! . . . See all the ruin—all! Watch all your hopes tumbling about your ears As these stones tumbled.

[*The Pilgrims, huddled together, look about them fearfully.*

FIRST PILGRIM. We do not understand.

SECOND PILGRIM. It is as though a thousand years and more

Had passed over the place——

FIRST PILGRIM. And it untended
A thousand years, by hand or heart of man.

THIRD PILGRIM. And for a thousand years devoid of prayer.

PILGRIMS. O Michael! Blessed St Michael! How is your church destroyed!

MICHAEL. God's Church is not destroyed until all faith is dead. And nothing can destroy the prayers of those who believe in prayer.

[*The Pilgrims turn and see Michael. They are amazed and relieved, bowing themselves before him.*

PILGRIMS. Blessed St Michael! Help us!

LUCIFER [*chuckling*]. Look at his hands.

PILGRIMS [*horrificed*]. His hands are bound! What has bound his hands?

LUCIFER [*indicating the Citizens*]. They have helped me to bind his hands.

[*The Pilgrims see the Citizens and are again amazed, making hesitant, fearful, but curious movements down-stage towards them.*

SECOND PILGRIM. What strange beings are these? Are we bewitched?

THIRD PILGRIM. See! They are bowed in grief. Is their grief like ours?

FIRST PILGRIM. Are they men like us—with their hope killed

Suddenly?

THIRD PILGRIM. And joy dead in a flash—like beauty.

MICHAEL. They are the men who shall build this church again.

FIRST PILGRIM [*doubting*]. Yet—they have bound your hands?

MICHAEL. But you shall teach them

That bound may be unbound.

PILGRIMS [*doubting*]. How shall we teach them

What we ourselves—now—do not know? If God

Cannot protect His own church, how shall He succour us?

How may we help you? How believe again

In any good?

MICHAEL [*warning*]. Keep hold on faith.

SECOND PILGRIM. Was it faith that brought us here?

Here, to a ruined church with evil abroad in it?

THIRD PILGRIM. And good—bound?

[The Pilgrims, filled with doubt and fear, are now in a group to the right of the second platform. The Citizens are kneeling to the left of the lowest platform. Lucifer is up-stage left and Michael down-stage right.]

LUCIFER [*pleasantly, to the Pilgrims, indicating the Citizens*]. These are the men who live in your world five hundred years after you. [*Laughing, again indicating the ruins*] You see how beautiful they have made the world.

FIRST PILGRIM [*gravely, to First Citizen*]. Is this true?

FIRST CITIZEN [*sadly*]. It is true.

SECOND PILGRIM [*to Second Citizen*]. We had our sins and our wars and our troubles—aye, we're no more than poor

simple sinners, the best of us. But you've had five hundred years to learn better than we.

SECOND CITIZEN [*sadly*]. Near two thousand years since Calvary.

THIRD PILGRIM [*wondering, to Third Citizen*]. Yet you have learned no better?

THIRD CITIZEN [*sadly*]. We have learned no better. We have learned only to make greater troubles and greater wars.

PILGRIMS [*sadly*]. Then what hope for the world?

CITIZENS [*sadly*]. What hope for the world, indeed?

MICHAEL. Hope goes always hand-in-hand with faith.

LUCIFER. But they have no faith. There is no faith.

[The Pilgrims move sadly down to the lowest platform and group themselves opposite the Citizens, kneeling and crouching in the same attitudes. Michael is sad. Lucifer is triumphant. Michael lifts his head, making a great effort.]

MICHAEL [*passionately*]. Is it for this Christ hangs upon the cross

Three hours—and twenty centuries? Is there no flame
Can light again these dulled souls? *To hope by faith,*
To faith through beauty. Is there no power of beauty
Yet living on the earth? Is God's gift of the rose
Less lovely than of old? Are there no powers in music?

[A brief passage of music, very soft and distant, broken off after a few notes—a mere whisper of music, as if to Michael's imagination alone. The Pilgrims and Citizens do not hear it. Lucifer is sardonic. But Michael, listening, is inspired. He addresses the Citizens more vigorously.]

Listen again!

God, making man in His own image, gave him
A little spark of godhead, so creating

Craftsman and craft alike, artist and vision
 Meet for great works to the greater glory of God.
 The living stone He gave, rich woods and metals,
 Pigments, and all the ecstasy of sounds
 In their innumerable variations
 From the leaf's whisper to His loudest music
 That sets the pattern of the dreadful fugue
 Backing the tempest—thunder. These He gave,
 And infinite variety of form;
 Curved grass-leaf, cloudy galleon, the small wing
 Of the ephemeral mayfly, and the grace
 Of the sleek panther. He gave man eyes to see,
 And a heart to burn, and hands to reach toward beauty.
 And a mind humbly to hold the vision of beauty,
 Toward which—in truth—no man may look without seeing
 Some shadow of a mightier thing beyond
 His present comprehension.

*[The Citizens have lifted their heads, catching something
 of Michael's inspiration. They stand up.]*

CITIZENS. We have known beauty,
 Fitfully glimpsed. Never abiding. Music——

LUCIFER [*sardonically*]. What? Jazz?

CITIZENS. Words bright and sharp as swords——

LUCIFER. And sticky crooners'

-Treacle to catch unthinking flies, with their loves and doves
 And moons and Junes, where silly boy meets girl
 To make a pair of morons and breed more,
 More, ever more of morons, while the world rots.

CITIZENS. We have seen beauty in gulls' wings——

LUCIFER. What of their beaks,

Curved to rend flesh and offal?

CITIZENS. We have seen

The lovely filigree of silver branches
 Through a veil of mist——

LUCIFER. And grumbled at the rain.

CITIZENS. And all the beauties of Nature——

LUCIFER [*enjoying himself*]. All of them.

The toad, the ass, the warthog and the duck,
God's jokes and misfits. And you have also known
The blind, the maimed, the mad; those who are blighted
For the sins of their fathers before them, visited
By a jealous God on several generations.
Beauty? [*Laughs contemptuously*.] Faugh!

CITIZENS. Surpassing beauty of woman
Made to conceive man in the shape of God.

LUCIFER [*mocking*]. Woman? Supreme? Showing her
thighs for hire

In the front row of the chorus.

[*Bowing ironically to Michael*] Your move, I think.

Or will you own you are beaten, and give up
This poor, half-damp, half-kindled human stuff
To me, their master? See Hell's paving-stones
Of good intentions, bowing down their backs.
I find them very funny, otherwise
I'd really rather give them back to God
And let Him sit eternally and watch
His greatest failure stewing in its juice.

[*Lucifer is overcome with laughter.*]

MICHAEL [*coldly*]. You ever had one fault—you talk too
much.

Your argument is cheap and over-coloured.

I've always heard Hell is a gaudy place,

Blunting the taste.

LUCIFER [*amused*]. Come down and see for yourself.
We'll give you special welcome, quite regardless
Of any expense——

MICHAEL [*impatiently*]. Enough! You waste my time.

[*Lucifer chuckles. Michael moves up-stage and stands*

in thought, his head raised. He speaks as if to himself.

To faith—through beauty. . . . Beauty is manifest
In a myriad ways to man, however flawed
And short of Heaven's perfection. How shall I show them?

LUCIFER. You waste your own time.

MICHAEL. Beauty with honesty,
With high devotion—and with a simple heart,
Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.

[Brief music, a simple medieval piece. Michael looks right or down-stage as on a sudden decision, beckoning with his bound hands.]

Ah! Come, my friend,
Come! Tell them what you dreamed of in your day
And what were the fruits of dream.

[The Architect enters right or through the audience. The music stops as he speaks to the Citizens.]

ARCHITECT. I dreamed in stone;
In beauty of strong stone, pillar and arch
Springing from true foundation; chancel and nave,
Triforium and clerestory; the fretted wonder
Of windows all about the illumined saints
And angels in coloured glass. And, above all,
The soaring benediction of the spire.

[With a gesture which indicates that he still sees his cathedral as standing.]

Look to what amplitude my dream was wrought
By God's good help.

[He is the only one who does not see the ruin of the cathedral. Michael watches him with affection, Lucifer sardonically. The Citizens and Pilgrims are despairing, in crouching groups.]

LUCIFER.

What do you see?

ARCHITECT *[calmly, not looking at Lucifer]*. I see

What I have said. And I should know, who made-it.
Not a shoddy piece, nor a flawed stone.

LUCIFER. You fool!
Look now!

[Lucifer bounds before the Architect, passing his hand before his eyes. The Architect starts back, fearful, then forgets Lucifer as he sees the ruin of his work. For a moment he stands in silence, reacting to what he sees, himself broken.]

ARCHITECT. My lovely church—broken and burned!
Arch—pillar—tracery gone!

[Michael steps down to the side of the Architect, to encourage him.]

MICHAEL. Five hundred years
And more, it stood.

ARCHITECT. It should have stayed a thousand.
Oh, what a work of devils is this!

MICHAEL. Of devils indeed!
But Hell yawns wide for devils. . . . Your cathedral
Is part already of eternal Heaven
Since men draw up to Heaven what lifts them there
In a divine reciprocation—

ARCHITECT *[too hurt to respond]*. I—
Forgive me, sir. I do not understand,
I am out of my proper time, and all o'erborne
With broken stones. I pray your pardon, sir.
I know not which is Heaven and which is Hell,
Save that I see Hell round me.

MICHAEL. Yet your church
Stands full and perfect still in the eyes of God.
And men—do you inspire them—will complete
The earthly shape again. *[Lucifer laughs.]*

ARCHITECT. I do not know.
It is a high thing you speak of, and my brain

Turns only on ruined work. I beg you give me
Leave to reflect awhile, to mourn awhile.

[The Architect, his head bowed, goes to the left side of the stage and sits on a block of masonry. From time to time he lifts his head to gaze sorrowfully at the ruin about him, then bows his face again between his hands. The Citizens and Pilgrims sink deeper into despair. Michael bows his head. Lucifer is triumphant.]

LUCIFER *[to Michael]*. So much for *that* trick. *[To the Citizens]*

Now I could show you tricks
Were I minded. I was ever a good showman.
We own the finest circus in the universe
And certainly the greatest show on earth!
Admission to the first performance free;
To the second—but a payment of no value,
A thing of no account—your soul. *[Laughing.]*

What? Beauty?
And how should that inspire you?
You see it at the pictures every week
(Some of you twice a week), full four times life-size
Close-ups of lips, of legs, of glycerine tears
And false long eyelashes, from Hollywood.
And you are satiate with sugared beauty,
The only kind you know. How many of you
Have opened Shakespeare, since you sat at lessons
And read him, willy-nilly, bowdrelized?
How many of you are really fond of Bach?
Or love the paintings of Augustus John?
Or dote on Epstein, when he isn't vulgar?
Beauty? You need no beauty—not his kind.

[He indicates Michael.]
Cold churches—colder saints, all iced with faith

And stiffened up with virtue. I can give you
Something brighter and warmer——

*[The Citizens are now at once repelled and fascinated
by Lucifer.]*

FIRST CITIZEN. There is a doom upon us.

CITIZENS. We are doomed to hate; doomed to leave that
we would have——

THIRD CITIZEN. Or think we would have——

CITIZENS. And follow that we would not.

FIRST CITIZEN. The finest things

Pass all above our heads——

SECOND CITIZEN. We are doomed to snatch

Always the second-rate——

THIRD CITIZEN. Always the meretricious.

We seek the glitter of gold.

FIRST CITIZEN. There is no glitter in faith,

So we have let faith slip out of our minds, our souls.

THIRD CITIZEN. Leaving emptiness.

SECOND CITIZEN. Into an empty place

The Devil always enters.

THIRD CITIZEN. Into a soul devoid of God

Another master comes.

FIRST CITIZEN. Yesterday and to-morrow

It is always the same. The doom!

CITIZENS AND PILGRIMS. The doom upon us!

[In passionate appeal]

O God! Who made the fire and the metal to forge in the fire,

And the world and the love and the homely things to

consume in the fire,

Have mercy upon us!

O Christ! Who on the splintered cross could bear the

unbearable pain

Of one forsaken awhile even by God,

Have mercy upon us!

Christ, have mercy upon us!

MICHAEL [*lifting his head*]. *How* do you call on God
And on His Son? From custom only and fear,
As little children, waking in the dark,
Call on their mothers? [*With a little more hope*]
Or do you cry in truth
From the lingering hunger of a faith yet living
And craving sustenance?

CITIZENS AND PILGRIMS [*uninspired, merely fearful*]. We
cry for mercy.

MICHAEL [*disappointed, but persisting*].
But scarce knowing to Whom you make your cry,
God is a name to you, a power remote
And vague. You must reach farther, and remember
That God sent down His Son to gather manhood
And *your* weakness and *your* every temptation,
That Christ, being man, might suffer as you do
And know your doubts and dangers; that, being man,
He might show all men all that man might be,
And, in that showing, for ever make Himself
At once a perfect example of man, and mirror
Of God's Own likeness. [*Pause*] Listen! Think on this:
Christ went alone into the great darkness
As very man, making the flesh of man
Strong to endure the pain; making His Spirit
Accept the utterest degradation,
And, through it all, in that waste land of doubt
He kept His faith alight. [*Pause*] That is the test.
Not suffering endured only with courage,
But suffering lit with an unfaltering faith.
In a living God, made real in the person of Christ.

CITIZENS AND PILGRIMS [*still doubtful*]. It is hard, the
path you show us, and we are weak.
If Christ would come again——

MICHAEL. He may not come,
 For God, through Him, has given the world one chance
 The world has not yet taken. Even God
 May not again offer His Son to die
 For the sins of man. [In sharp question]

Do you cry indeed from the soul?
 [The Citizens and Pilgrims bow their heads, not able to
 reply.]

LUCIFER. They cry from naught more heavenly than fear.
 [He leaves the Citizens and goes up to Michael, tempting him.]
 Do not cling longer to a lost cause, Michael.
 Lost causes are uncomfortable things.
 My terms are generous for an armistice:
 You shall have rank and honour in my kingdom,
 And I—no more than what is mine already—
 The immortal part of man.

MICHAEL [angrily]. Do you dare tempt me?
 You are enough to try the very patience
 Of an archangel. [Calmer] But I will bear with you
 A little longer. I shall break your wings
 And bind you, in God's time.

LUCIFER [drawing himself up, furious and terrible]. You shall
 bind me?

Come, all you powers of Hell! This is our day!

[Stormy music and thunder. Lucifer, with a sweeping movement of anger, raises his sword and, with great (stylized) blows that clang on Michael's armour, drives him about the stage. Michael, unable to defend himself because of his bound hands, falls back from Lucifer and, wounded, sinks against a block of masonry to the right. The Citizens and Pilgrims react in concerted movements of horror, groaning. During the struggle the following lines are said, sharp and staccato with fear.]

FIRST PILGRIM. God has given the earth to ruin!

FIRST CITIZEN. God has sickened of our sins!

SECOND PILGRIM. We have no escape from hell!

SECOND CITIZEN. We have sinned and we must die!

THIRD PILGRIM. Prayer and faith are an illusion!

THIRD CITIZEN. Even the angels die with us!

[The struggle and the music stop.]

ARCHITECT *[standing up]*. O God! I spared not blood nor brain to build You a worthy house—but You let Your enemies destroy it, and who shall build it again? Could You indeed be God, and not prevent this thing?

MICHAEL *[wearily, leaning against the stone]*. O God—is there no spark of faith? Is this the end of all Your creation, and the end of man? You are merciful, but man has not deserved Your further mercy. *[Passionately]* Father of all!—if there be ten still faithful—or but two——

[Michael stops, exhausted.]

FIRST CITIZEN *[despairing]*. To what shall we look forward?

Shall we look to the black ruin that once was Heaven?

To a desolation of angels' broken wings?

CITIZENS AND PILGRIMS. Shall we lift our eyes to the empty and echoing hills?

Shall we bury our great grief in the depths of the sea?

Shall we, like Job, consider if it were better

To curse God and die?

MICHAEL *[lifting his head, with a great effort]*. You shall look again into your hearts. Perhaps there yet remains a spark of faith to be kindled. Look now—swiftly—for I am all but spent——

[But the Citizens, Pilgrims, and Architect remain despairing. Michael sinks lower against the stone. Lucifer moves down to address the Citizens and Pilgrims.]

LUCIFER [*mocking*]. Faith? Faith in a scheme of things that is no more than a wheel turning stupidly ever in the same place, bringing ever the same sequence of trials? Birth and pain and fear! Hunger and pain and struggle! War and pain and death! Shall one have faith in a wheel whose spokes are always pain?

CITIZENS. The daily round, the common task,
Furnishing little but the weekly wages
When one is very lucky.

FIRST CITIZEN. At best it is
A rather dreary round, and then, too often,
A terror of unemployment——

SECOND CITIZEN. Degradation
Of the dole queue, of the dolorous dole——

THIRD CITIZEN. Men standing with animal patience waiting a pittance
Enough to keep the stomach faintly living——

SECOND CITIZEN. But not the heart——

THIRD CITIZEN. Not the brain——

FIRST CITIZEN. Not, not the soul!

CITIZENS. And now in this day,
War has o'erwhelmed us all in devastation,
Fire, loss and ruin; pain to gild the days,
The grey days of another common round.

PILGRIMS. As with you, so with us. But our lives were harder.

For us there was no dole save charity,
And that infrequent.

FIRST PILGRIM. Where a man fell out
Of the race of life, he could lie and rot, for all
Most men would care.

SECOND PILGRIM. And we, the poor, were crowded
In filthy hovels. We tilled our little strips
For a snatched living——

THIRD PILGRIM. In the flickering light
Of our one poor candle, holding at bay the dark,
We could see more plain the shadows, but not see
What things of witchcraft hovered in the shadows,
Known and unknown, ready to pounce——

SECOND PILGRIM. The darkness,
Brought things lurking stealthy about our walls,
The terror by night, the evil by day——

FIRST PILGRIM. The scourges
Of the plague, the sweating sickness, the Black Death.

THIRD PILGRIM. Though we had taken to ourselves these
trials

With no thought from the ordinary——

PILGRIMS. Yet now
We stay to ask: "How can a living God
So grievously afflict us? Can it be possible,
Where such hard life is, there is a God at all?"

PILGRIMS AND CITIZENS. Horror! There is no God!
We are cast away!

CITIZENS. We have become of all men most unhappy.

PILGRIMS. Not for a lost faith only.

CITIZENS. No. For we see
There never has been an object of our faith.

PILGRIMS. This is our doom. We have followed only a
marsh-light.

CITIZENS. And now we are in the clinging mire and the
dark,

For there is no God!

PILGRIMS. There is no God!

PILGRIMS AND CITIZENS. And all
Is emptiness!

*[The Citizens and Pilgrims bow themselves in despair.
Lucifer addresses them, pleasantly.]*

LUCIFER. My friends—ancient and modern. You have

something that I happen to want; something of no use whatever to you; in fact, you're far better without it. Because, like a rotten tooth, it's apt to wake up and hurt you sometimes. You may ask why I want what is of no use to you, but that's easily answered. I am a collector, and collectors, as you know, are hardly ever quite sane about the things they collect. I want your old souls, my friends. And I can pay a big price for them—pleasure, sensation, ease, and self-indulgence. And freedom from want and fear, as another gentleman said quite recently. Walk up, now, and sign on the dotted line. I'm a strict keeper of bargains.

[Lucifer takes a quill and a scroll from his dress, moves up to the altar and sits on it, waiting for his customers.]

FIRST CITIZEN. We have come down, far down, through
the sunless valley
To the place where hope sickens. Nevermore
Shall glad sound, or song of bird, or the voices of youth in
laughter
Quicken our souls——

THIRD PILGRIM. Or a new-springing note
Cleave through the veils of silence evermore
Clinging——

SECOND CITIZEN. Clinging——

FIRST PILGRIM. Impenetrable——

THIRD CITIZEN. Forbidding joy.

FIRST CITIZEN. We have come down, far down, through
the long valley
To a place of ultimate silence. Even pain
Is dulled now——

FIRST PILGRIM. No more wounding. No more struggling and striving
In the clawed grip——

SECOND CITIZEN. And what celestial gain
Ever has been for the writhing soul in the dark of pain?

THIRD PILGRIM. What is the use of it all? What has ever
been

The use of it all?

THIRD CITIZEN. We have been told that man is ennobled
by suffering.

Have they suffered who told us?

SECOND PILGRIM. Do they offer
No more than a pretty dish of wishful thinking?

PILGRIMS AND CITIZENS. No more than that?
Our souls are dead, dead as leaves that, lingering, cling to
the winter branch;

Cling in despair, not hope, and, in their clinging,

Know they never shall know the sap springing.

Never again. Never know

Aught of burgeoning hope. And nevermore

Know anything of joy.

[Brief pause, then, in dreary, matter-of-fact voices :
Let us make the best bargain we are able to make.

MICHAEL [another great effort]. No!

[The Citizens and Pilgrims take no notice of Michael,
but begin to make a tentative, concerted movement
towards Lucifer, as if about to offer their souls to
him. Michael weakly and vainly struggles with his
bonds, crying out in agony.

O God! Help us!

[Faint, sweet music, perhaps an "Ave Maria."
Michael revives somewhat and looks up. The
Citizens, Pilgrims, and Architect lift their heads
in sudden new hope. Lucifer, angry and uneasy,
shrinks back towards the left. The music swells up.
There is a tense pause, as of breathless waiting.
The Young Woman and Young Man enter, either

right or through the audience, as ordinary visitors to the ruins. They stand looking quietly about them for a moment, not seeing the other characters, all of whom are intent on them. They see only the ruined cathedral. The music fades out. They speak quite simply, a little awed by their surroundings at first.

YOUNG WOMAN. This is the cathedral. I knew it before the war. I'm afraid I didn't appreciate it properly then, but I've wanted to come back to it—now.

YOUNG MAN. So have I. Before the war I didn't think much about things—religion and all that, I mean. But now—well, all the pain and the courage and the waste and the glory have made me think.

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes—a whole lot of us have come to realize that we aren't put into the world just to chase after what we used to call a good time. [*With a rueful little laugh*] And not so good, either.

YOUNG MAN. Not so good—what we thought was happiness. We're meant to be happy, but we don't properly know what happiness is, or how to get it.

YOUNG WOMAN. We're learning. [*She indicates the ruins with a wide gesture.*] All this won't fail of its purpose.

YOUNG MAN [*thoughtfully*]. When you look at it what do you think of?

YOUNG WOMAN. I think—— [*She hesitates a moment, then adds, impulsively*] I think of Christ on His cross. I think of God Who deliberately took on a mass of troubles so that He could show us the way out of them. Yes—I think of Christ showing us what God is like and what man may rise to. [*Pause*] You know, once one begins to think, one can't let go of these things. There's something—as though Some One is helping. . . .

YOUNG MAN [*eagerly*]. Helping towards a vital belief—an

active and everyday belief—that we've got the job of learning to stand properly upright, and of helping others to stand.

YOUNG WOMAN [*eagerly*]. An everyday belief—God on weekdays. That's it! [*Puzzled*] Yet there's nothing so new in that; nothing to shake the world.

YOUNG MAN. There's nothing new in it—but it could shake the world. You know, I've felt I had to make this—this pilgrimage, as soon as I could.

YOUNG WOMAN. That's just what I've felt about it—like the pilgrims of the Middle Ages. [*Pause, then, awed again*] Do you feel that this cathedral inspires one now, even more than when it was whole and beautiful?

YOUNG MAN [*awed*]. Yes. As if these broken arches lift one to a truer sight of what are the great things, the good things. [*With growing confidence*] I can see this: in the rebuilding of this cathedral, men will be rebuilding their own faith. [*On a sudden realization*] Our coming here is an act of faith.

YOUNG WOMAN. An act of faith. [*Inspired*] I believe in the power and the love and the goodness of God. I believe in the redemption of man through the sacrifice and the example of Christ.

[*Brief pause. Lucifer, thinking he had better do something about this, goes to them.*]

LUCIFER [*easily*]. Don't talk a lot of sentimental nonsense, my dear young people. You know very well that faith is a delusion. And as for redemption—

[*He laughs, but his laugh quickly gives place to uneasiness. They do not even know he is there.*]

YOUNG MAN. Light after darkness! And a perfection building up through the ruin that man has made of the world.

YOUNG WOMAN. A new world, where men can live to-

gether without strife and hatred—where I can bring up children without envy and without fear.

YOUNG MAN [*taking her hands*]. A world for all men—and for us—without envy and without fear.

LUCIFER [*sourly*]. And how many times in the world's history, do you suppose, have silly young people like you said silly young things like that? It's only because you're in love with each other—for what that's worth!

[*He walks round them. They still do not know he is there. But the Young Woman suddenly lifts her head and looks towards Michael, though without seeing him.*]

YOUNG WOMAN [*awed*]. There is something good here. Not only the inspiration of this place, but something more.

YOUNG MAN. I feel it too. More even than the prayers of ages that have soaked into the stone. There are so many things we can't see——

YOUNG WOMAN [*confidently*]. But we believe.

YOUNG MAN. Yes. We believe.

[*They look at each other for a moment, then go up to the altar and kneel before it, still hand-in-hand. Music, soft and distant, inspiring. The bonds slip from Michael's hands. He straightens himself, spreading his hands at first a little from his sides, then gradually wider and higher with a suggestion of spreading wings. Lucifer watches him, afraid.*]

MICHAEL [*at his full height, strong and confident*]. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. •

[*Michael draws his sword, taking it by the blade and holding it up before him like a cross. The music grows louder. Michael cries in a ringing voice:*

In the Name of God, I drive all evil from His holy place!

[*Lucifer shrinks away from Michael, crouching, holding his left hand before his eyes as though to shut out*

the glory of Michael, who advances on him, step by step, holding up the sword. The music changes to peals of thunder. Alternatively, Michael drives Lucifer off with sweeping, stylized blows of his sword, Lucifer giving a great cry at each blow. Lucifer backs away to the left, his arms raised to shield his head, finally turning and plunging off left amid a loud and then diminishing roll of thunder. The music has stopped. The Citizens, Pilgrims, and Architect watch tensely, reviving. The Young Woman and Young Man, praying, take no notice of the conflict. After Lucifer is driven off Michael moves to up-stage right on the highest platform. The Architect joins the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims and Citizens regroup into two oblique lines, forming a sort of triangle without a base, the apex of which is just below the steps of the altar. Each individual looks towards the altar, with arms stretched towards the fallen cross.

PILGRIMS AND CITIZENS. Courage is new in our veins,
and our eyes are lifted
Toward the ultimate beauty. We tread the path
Of the high fulfilment of God's purpose for man:
That he should stand and look upward, not crawl on the
earth.

We stand together in brotherhood. Naught shall affright us
hereafter.

FIRST CITIZEN AND FIRST PILGRIM. Not the fear and the
knowledge of sin and the heart that must ache in
frustration——

SECOND CITIZEN AND SECOND PILGRIM. Not the
soul that must ever repent of its clinging portion of
earth——

THIRD CITIZEN AND THIRD PILGRIM. Not the black

wings of the angel of death and the darkness to come——

PILGRIMS AND CITIZENS. None of these things!
None of these things shall have power any more to stay us,
For doubt, doubt is dead!

FIRST PILGRIM. I have seen great good arising out of evil
Like a saint's prayers in the darkness.

FIRST CITIZEN. And I have seen
Men's hearts and their courage renewed, and a power of
wings

Of legions of angels about us——

SECOND PILGRIM. Lifting us up;
Lifting our hearts and our eyes, that we crawl on the earth
no more.

SECOND CITIZEN. I see that truth is immortal, goodness
eternal.
For God shall prevail in the end, and goodness and truth are
nourished

By the very hand of God.

THIRD PILGRIM. I see a flower,
New-opened, blooming immaculate, on a dunghill,
The flower of faith——

THIRD CITIZEN. And, after the flower, a star
Serene in the stormy heavens—the star of the promise of
God.

*[The Pilgrims and Citizens move up in two lines towards
the fallen cross. The Young Woman and Young
Man rise from their knees, turn, and move down
to the lower level.]*

PILGRIMS, CITIZENS, AND ARCHITECT. We will arise!
We accept the star and the struggle;
We affirm the faith and the purpose;
We take the pain with the joy; the gain with the loss
Indivisibly knit. We accept the Christ and the cross.

[The Architect and First Pilgrim and Citizen raise the cross and set it erect. They move away to their previous positions. The Architect stands just behind and slightly higher. Michael moves to before the cross on the highest level, holding up his sword so that its hilt makes another cross. All are facing down-stage towards the audience, with the Pilgrims and Citizens grouped to either side.]

[All, together with the audience, sing the "Te Deum" to an inspiring chant, or Hymn 431 A. & M. ("Disposer supreme").]

[The players go off, singing, during the closing verses of the chant or hymn, in the following order: Young Woman and Young Man, Citizens, Pilgrims, Architect.]

[Michael, alone on the stage, speaks the following Epilogue.]

MICHAEL. Here we end our mystery
And, though all unworthily
We have striven here to raise
Your hearts and ours to God in praise,
May our labours in this place
Find acceptance of His grace,
That His blessing now may fall
On our work and on us all.

[Michael goes off, during a black-out if the performance is by artificial light.]

[Concluding music, of a triumphal nature.]

Down to the Seas

By Stuart Ready

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CHARACTERS

STEPHEN VENNER

SARAH, *his mother*

MARY, *his sister*

MARTIN, *his father*

BOB, *his brother*

SUE LAWSON

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton
Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New
York*

Down to the Seas

The scene is the living-room of a fisherman's cottage. It is barely furnished, but scrupulously clean and tidy.

There is a door at the back, left of centre, to the street. Another door down left leads to the rest of the cottage. A window back centre, and below it a small table with an oil-lamp, lit. Between the window and the street door is a rack with about four pegs. On it hang a set of oilskins, and two shawls. There may be some other gear also, if desired.

There is a horsehair sofa at the left wall above the door down-stage. A table, right of centre, is set for supper. There is a wooden chair with arms at the head and two small wooden chairs on either side. The tray at the lower end of the table has cups, milk, sugar, etc., but as yet no teapot.

At the right wall, a dresser with the usual household articles. Properties other than those in the plot may be added at the discretion of the producer for the purpose of realism.

Sarah Venner is discovered arranging the table for the meal. She is a gaunt, virile woman of over sixty. She is plainly dressed, but the apron she wears over her dark skirt is snowy-white. Her face is strong and a little hard; time, and a life of struggle, has given to the Venner women a mask of grim endurance.

Mary comes in from the left with an earthenware teapot. She is a tall, strong woman, nearing forty. She is exactly as her mother was twenty years earlier. The only marked difference is that she is sharper-tongued and less resigned to the force of circumstances. After placing the teapot on the table she goes to the window.

MARY. Wind's gettin' up.

SARAH [*above and right of the table*]. Nor'west. I near lost my basket comin' from behind Crab Rock.

MARY. Yes. [*Returning to the left of the table to help*] They won't get a boat off to-night.

SARAH. Let's hope there's no need. Where's Bob?

MARY. In the shed, workin' on the nets. He needn't trouble. [*During the next few speeches Mary cuts bread, etc.*]

SARAH. Nor'west'r don't blow a week. 'Tain't Bob's sort to be idle. Our boats must be ready 'gainst a better spell o' weather.

MARY. In the nor'west'r that came November there was a ship on the Ledge. Isn't it time they put a motor-vessel near to these parts?

SARAH [*right of the table, arranging plates, etc.*]. Past time, as a dozen drownin's from this village can tell; but they ain't done it, so, if needs be, our boat will go out.

MARY. Sometimes I'm glad I've no man—never knowin' just when it's goin' to happen. The sea's a cruel beast.

SARAH. Cruel enough. It took my father when I was ten, and your father's father. Some day it'll take him.

[*She turns to the dresser.*]

MARY. You talk of it easily.

SARAH. No way else. [*Bringing a cheese-dish from the dresser to the table*] When you've heard that wind for sixty an' two years, you learn not to heed a lot. So long as 'tis needed, there'll always be a Venner to take the boat.

MARY. Bob's not what he was. He's bad, Mother—I've watched him. He shouldn't go with the boat no more. Ever since that wreck last March his heart's been worse than we know.

SARAH [*simply*]. He's alive, no thanks to the sea. Fourteen hours in icy water, clingin' to an upturned boat. Only the strongest man on the coast could have lived through that.

MARY. He shouldn't go no more.

SARAH. That's the only time I ever cursed the sea. I'd rather it had taken my man, or had taken Bob clean.

MARY. Bob's got brains; he can serve the coast an' us without takin' to the boat. [*She puts down the bread-knife.*]

SARAH [*right of the lower end of the table*]. 'Tain't Bob's way.

MARY. That or nothin'. [*Doubtfully*] There's still Stephen.

SARAH. Aye. [*She removes the tea-cosy.*] I'll pour out the tea; they'll be here any minute.

[*Mary goes over to the window. Sarah, seated right of the table, lower end, begins to pour out the tea.*]

MARY. There's a scuddin' moon. I'll see them as they come up from the beach.

SARAH. Stephen will come landwards.

MARY [*turning*]. Lawson's?

SARAH. He went to the farm early evenin'. He'll come from that way.

MARY [*bitterly*]. The farm! [*She looks out of the window again.*] One day he'll go an' not come back anyway.

SARAH. He'll come back when 'tis time.

MARY. Will he? [*She moves away from the window to down-stage left-centre.*] There's one Venner with precious little salt in his blood. That girl o' Lawson's has a stronger hold on him than ever the sea had.

SARAH. That's a step on the shingle. [*She rises.*]

MARY [*turning up to the window again*]. Stephen.

SARAH. I'll get his meal.

[*She crosses below the table and exits left. Mary remains at the window, at the left end of it. Presently Stephen comes in. He is a young fisherman of about twenty-five. He wears a blue jersey and pilot cap. He has a strong, handsome face, but at this moment there is something sullen and furtive about his manner. He goes straight to the table and sits, on the up-stage chair left of the table.*]

MARY [*without turning*]. You come from the beach?

STEPHEN [*he is preoccupied and does not seem to hear her at first*]. Eh? . . . Yes, yes; I come from the beach. There's a devil of a wind gettin' up, an' the sea's as rough as I've seen it this fall.

MARY [*curiously, turning to look at him*]. You went to see what the chances were of bein' called out?

STEPHEN [*shortly*]. O' course.

MARY. Are you satisfied?

STEPHEN. What the devil d'ye mean, Mary? I've had enough o' your sneakin' an' spyin'——!

MARY. Spyin'? [*With a short laugh, moving down to the head of the table*] No need for that. I wonder you troubled to see what the weather bade. It's snug and warm up in Lawson's farm kitchen.

STEPHEN. Let be! I warn you; let be, Mary!

[*Mary moves down right to the dresser as Sarah enters left with a plate of food which she takes across to Stephen.*]

SARAH [*above the table, putting the plate before Stephen*]. Your father an' Bob comin' up?

STEPHEN. Father'll be here in a minute. [*He commences to eat.*] I didn't see Bob. He reckons to take the nets out if the wind drops.

SARAH [*crossing left*]. This wind won't drop. [*Turning at left-centre*] Ye'll be stayin' in?

STEPHEN [*shortly, without turning*]. Yes; I'll be stayin' in.
[*Sarah turns, and exits left.*]

MARY [*coming down a little, right of the table*]. You're easy at lyin', Stephen. You'll stay for nothin' but what suits you, an' I reckon Sue Lawson'll guide you. D'ye think we don't know that every day she's pullin' you farther an' farther away from us?

STEPHEN [*putting down his knife and fork*]. That's enough!

MARY [*viciously*]. You'll hear me speak! Maybe I'm the

only Venner as says as they think. A hundred an' fifty years we've been on this coast, an' the name o' Venner's stood like the headland out there. You're not a boy now, an' you're as good a seaman as the rest. There's an old man an' a sick one atween you an' the head o' this family. You'll not give that up to live on a farm with a piece of a girl——

STEPHEN [*rising and pushing back his chair*]. By God——!

[*The strength of the wind is heard for the first time. At that moment it rattles furiously against the window. Both turn instinctively in that direction.*]

MARY. You see? 'Tisn't just me that's speakin'.

[*She crosses in silence and exits left. Stephen sits again, then he pushes his plate away, rises, and goes moodily up to the window. He observes some one approach and goes quickly to the door. As he opens it Sue Lawson comes in. She is a pretty country girl of twenty, a sensible girl with strength of character. It is only in contrast to the Venner women that she ever appears fragile. She wears a waterproof with a hood.*]

STEPHEN. Sue! [*With some difficulty he fastens the door behind her, for the wind has increased in strength.*] What made you come here? Why, you're wet.

SUE [*moving down left-centre*]. I took the short cut over the fields; it's raining in the wind. You don't like my coming?

STEPHEN [*with a half-look towards the door left*]. Quiet; we aren't alone. [*He goes over to the door left to see if the coast is clear. Then he comes back quickly to the left of Sue and takes her in his arms.*] Oh, Sue! Why did you come here?

SUE. The sea's rough. There were people hurrying about on the beach. I was frightened.

[*She disengages herself and moves away to the centre.*]

STEPHEN. Frightened I'd be called out to a wreck and never heed what we planned?

SUE. Yes. [*She turns to him.*] Oh, no! No, Stephen; I didn't think you'd do that, but I don't trust that sea. It seems as though all the time it's drawing you, drawing you away.

STEPHEN [*almost roughly*]. It'll draw me no more; I've a mind of my own. [*Urgently*] You remember what we decided? There must be no goin' back.

SUE [*anxiously*]. You're frightened your family will stop you?

STEPHEN. No one can stop me. I've made up my mind to quit this, an' that's the end. It's just—just that I'm leavin' 'em, an' it's best done quiet.

SUE. I know; I know. [*Taking a pace towards him*] But we'll be happy, Steve.

STEPHEN [*putting his hands on her shoulders*]. We'll be happy, dearest one. It's not the callin' it was, an' I've my own life to make. Remember, at the foot of the hill at eleven o'clock. My chap won't fail me; then we get a lift into town. To-morrow we're married, an' damn 'em all.

SUE. Then home to the farm for all our lives, Stephen.

STEPHEN [*drawing a long breath*]. Aye. I'll be a proper farmer; I'll fight the stubborn earth, as my people fought the sea. At least, it don't kill you.

SUE. I must go. They will hear me and come in; then there will be bitterness, and we've had enough of that.

[*They embrace. Then Sue releases herself, and is about to move to the door when Martin Venner comes in. He is a rugged, bearded fisherman of nearly seventy. He is clad in oilskins and sou'wester. He is a grim, quiet man, with a gruff authority of manner. He leans against the door to close it in the teeth of the wind.*]

MARTIN. Get down to the sheds, Steve, an' warn Bob to stand by for a call.

STEPHEN. A call? Is there a ship——?

MARTIN [*shortly*]. I said for to stand by.

[*He moves down left-centre.*]

STEPHEN [*hesitating*]. You'd better come with me, Sue.

MARTIN. Your ways lie different. What should John Lawson's daughter do down at the beach? [*To Stephen*] You heard me.

STEPHEN [*moving up*]. All right. [*Defiantly, at the door*] At least, they can't refuse you shelter.

[*He pulls his oilskin from the hook and goes out.*
Martin removes his dripping sou'wester and shakes it.]

MARTIN. Ye're welcome to any shelter you need.

SUE [*up left-centre, a little defiantly*]. Are you sure I'm welcome, Mr Venner?

MARTIN [*he does not answer, but goes across to the door left and calls*]. Mother! Mary! Here's a lady visitor Steve left while he went to fetch Bob.

[*Sarah comes to the door left, with a plate in her hand.*]

SARAH. Your meal's ready.

[*She crosses right, to the head of the table.*]

MARTIN. I'll rest a bit when I've had it. There's a ship not a quarter-mile off the Ledge. She may need us.

[*He goes into the room left.*]

SARAH [*setting Martin's food on the table*]. Ye can sit if ye've a mind to.

SUE [*going to the door up left-centre*]. No, I'd better go——
[*Turning suddenly*] Why do you hate me so, Mrs Venner?

SARAH. I've never hated nothin' in my life, except the sea.

SUE [*with sudden passion, moving down a little*]. The sea! The sea! Why do you stay here, all of you? It's a barren, hard life. It kills your menfolk. It takes everything, and gives nothing but sorrow and death and loneliness.

SARAH [*simply*]. We've always been here.

[*She moves down left of the table. Mary opens the door left and stands listening.*]

SUE. It's madness. There's no living to be got worth the name. People say this part of the coast is cursed. It must be, for others would have come, and it would be big and prosperous. Why don't you go somewhere else where it's kinder?

MARY [*quietly*]. You mean, why don't Stephen go.

SUE [*turning to her*]. I said all of you.

[*Sarah moves below the table to the dresser right.*]

MARY [*moving up right-centre*]. That's what you said, Sue Lawson, but it's Stephen you're thinkin' about. [*Turning to Sue*] Don't worry; he'll go to your lush meadows an' your easy livin'. You have but to whistle him.

SUE. You've no right to say that! If Stephen loves me—

MARY. Stephen? [*With a bitter laugh*] Only a woman knows how to love. I'm a crabbed, hard woman, but I've had my man. Oh, yes, an' I loved him well enough.

SARAH [*quietly*]. Let be; let be.

MARY. That's an old story now, but I was ready to fly off with him just as Stephen will with you. But he wasn't one of us. He would have taken me from the ache an' the toil an' the rough life, so I sent him packin'.

SUE. Then you were wrong! That's because you were hard and cruel!

MARY. Was it? You haven't learnt everythin' in your twenty years. [*She goes up to the window, and looks out.*]

SUE. I won't listen to you any more. Yōū can't stop us, none of you!

SARAH [*quietly, as she moves across to the left of the table*]. We can't stop you, lass, nor would we wish to if ye've a

mind to take Steve. Maybe he'll go with ye to the farmin' life an' find happiness; but he'll come back.

SUE. Never!

SARAH. He'll come back, when he's the last Venner man. Some o' them have broken with the sea, but they come back, will they or no. I've seen it. 'Tain't for pity, neither, but because they must. The sea life calls for a man's strength, an' there's always been a man to take the Venner boat. If you would have Steve always, you must come to him, not him to you.

SUE. No, no! I couldn't bear that—to live the lives you lead and wait as you wait. And you've no right to keep him against his will. He's young; he's not the only one you have. [*The wind rattles the windows and door.*] Must you send them all to that?

SARAH. It don't rest with us, lass; 'tis just a thing atween him an' the sea.

[*She moves up to above and right of the table.*

[*Martin returns from the left. He still wears his sea-boots, but carries his oilskin and sou'wester. He goes up left-centre, and places them on the peg.*

MARTIN [*crossing to the chair at the head of the table*]. This wind won't ease afore mornin'. [*Looking across at Sue*] You'd best be goin' homealong, missie.

SUE. All right. [*She places the hood over her head and goes to the street door.*] You make me hate you!

[*She opens the door with difficulty and goes out. Mary moves down left of the table. The two women attend to Martin's requirements.*

MARY. It's a pretty nose for trouble brought Sue Lawson here to-night of all times. One could guess she'd flutter at the first raise o' the wind. [*She gives Martin some bread.*

MARTIN [*commencing his supper*]. Brenner Castle, they say

she is—makin' for Lowestoft an' heavy-loaded. If she don't clear the Ledge by nine o' the clock, she'll strike.

SARAH [*pouring tea for Martin*]. God send she'll make it safe.

MARTIN. Aye; but somehow they don't when they gets atween the Ledge an' a nor'west'r.

SARAH. You'll take the boat?

[*She takes the cup to the right of Martin.*]

MARTIN. I'll take it.

[*The door is opened again. Stephen comes back, accompanied by his brother, Bob. The latter is a big man of thirty-odd, strongly built and with a rough, off-hand manner. He has the almost fanatical sea-pride of the Venner men, and it is only very occasionally one is able to perceive he is not the physically perfect specimen he looks. He stands at the door for some seconds regaining his breath. He has the coat and jersey worn by the others, but no oilskins. Mary moves up towards the window—Sarah down to the teapot. Stephen removes his oilskins, moves to the table, and sits on his father's left.*]

BOB. There weren't no need to send a message to me. [*Moving down a little*] This wind means business.

MARY. Where's the vessel they sighted?

BOB [*crossing right, above the table*]. Stuck out there atween the Ledge an' the shore like a fly under a pin. [*Pulling out the chair right of Martin*] Go which way she will, she'll strike.

MARTIN. She made no sign?

BOB [*sitting*]. Not yet. [*Sarah gives him a cup of tea.*]

MARTIN [*pushing his plate away*]. I've had enough; I'll get a rest, if there's time.

MARY [*to the left of Martin*]. You've had nothin'. There's plenty o' youngsters can take your place for a turn.

MARTIN [*shortly*]. I'm cox o' the lifeboat.

MARY. Yes, but that's not to say——

MARTIN. Don't I speak plain? You can take that plate away.

[Mary takes the plate and exits left. Sarah gives Stephen a cup, then goes over to the sofa and picks up some needlework. Rising, Martin pulls a pipe from his pocket and fills it slowly, moving right-centre.]

There be no call for you to hurry, Bob.

BOB *[dangerously]*. Oh?

MARTIN. Harry Davidson's takin' your place in the boat.

BOB *[rising]*. By God——!

MARTIN *[sharply]*. Easy, now. We've plenty to think about. D'ye want us to carry freight in a lifeboat? There'll be work an' plenty for you ashore, but you're liftin' no oar in a craft I take.

BOB *[sitting]*. Think I'll crack, eh?

MARTIN *[moving back to the head of the table]*. I ain't a fool. *[He pats Bob roughly on the shoulder.]* Ye're the best sailor on this coast, but that March duckin' finished you for the boat.

[He lights his pipe.]

BOB *[bitterly]*. Aye; I'm to wait along o' the women, eh? That's pretty good. If my heart won't stand it, what in hell do it matter which way I go?

MARTIN. It matter a whole lot, since you stand for Venner when I'm taken. *[He moves across to centre.]* That wind'll be gone to-morrow, an' there'll be a smooth-runnin' sea an' fish in it. *[Facing Bob]* Then we'll need a man's head as well as an oar in a boat. *[He goes down left and turns.]* Maybe the sea'll take us all in its time, but we'll watch it takes us one by one.

[He exits left. Sarah rises and goes over to the head of the table to see if anything is required by the two men.]

BOB. Stationed ashore! Maybe they'll find me a sheltered place where the wind don't blow. By God! I'd like to show 'em!

STEPHEN. Let be, Bob. You know he spoke for the best.

BOB. That don't alter it. [*To Sarah*] You'll be glad, won't ye? Nice to have a son about the place, tucked away from all harm. Fourteen hours I clung to a boat keel just so's I might live to fight the sea again. D'ye think I did that so's I could spend the rest o' my days like a landed fish? I'd rather the sea had taken me good an' proper——!

[He stops abruptly and strains back in the chair, his hand to his heart. Stephen rises anxiously, but it is Sarah who reaches for a cup. Her movements are deliberate and unhurried. After a sip or two Bob recovers.]

[*Mockingly*] You see; I have to be careful.

SARAH. There's that cordial the doctor give ye. [*Crossing down left*] I'll fetch it from your room. [*Turning at the door*] Ye're mistaken, son, if ye think I'm glad. [*She exits left.*]

BOB [*feelingly*]. Great God! but this is a trick to serve on a man.

STEPHEN [*turning his chair to face down-stage*]. He's right, an' you know it. It'd be death for you to take an oar.

BOB. There's worse things nor that.

STEPHEN. Well, ain't there others? Must we always make a gamble of it with three Venners in the boat? Our family's served the coast well enough——

BOB. What o' that? Maybe you're not so keen on the job?

STEPHEN. I've been with the boat every call since I was seventeen. But there comes a time——

BOB. Yes, there comes a time when ye've had enough, eh? A time when ye grow soft an' think more of a woman's arms——

STEPHEN [*sharply, sitting up*]. I don't want to hear that talk, I tell ye.

BOB. Don't think I don't know your turn o' mind. The youngest son goes a-farmin', an' all along of a pretty face that don't relish the sea-spray.

STEPHEN. What if it is? [*Hotly*] 'Tain't because I'm feared of it, but I've a notion to change my ways o' life. There's a dozen men in the village ready an' willin' to go with the boat. They're waitin' on the beach now.

BOB. They can wait. Time enough when there's no Venner left. If your woman won't take her chance among us, let her go to the devil.

STEPHEN [*rising*]. I'll trouble you not to talk of her——!

BOB. Aye, ye're hot, ain't ye? But 'tain't the sort o' heat to weld a man to his work. Ye can love a girl for a year or two, but I tell ye ye're like the rest of us—wedded to the sea an' the sands an' the sharp rocks.

STEPHEN. You can talk like that, Bob, because you've no wish to be different, but I have! [*He turns away and up to the window. Sarah enters with a small phial. She takes it to the table and pours some of the liquid into a cup.*] I'm tired of it all! I'll get away from it, say what you like. I'll take her away from the sound o' the sea——!

SARAH [*above the table*]. All the same, you'll hear it, just as other of our men have who sought to break with it. We're not as other folk. Some say as there's but one Venner man, an' him the head one—that this chair has never lacked some one to fill it, nor never shall.

BOB [*taking the cup from Sarah*]. An' them ahead o' ye is an old man an' a sick one. But don't you fret—I'll keep ye waitin'——!

[*With sudden passion he drains the contents and hurls the cup across the room. Sarah goes across to pick up the fragments. As she is on her knees the signal*

rocket sounds and there is distant shouting from the shore.

[*Rising*] She's struck! A proud vessel with lives an' a rich cargo—split on the Ledge till she breaks!

[He moves down right below the table.

[Martin re-enters left. Sarah rises and takes Martin's oilskins off the peg, holding them out for him.

MARTIN [*urgently, as he goes to Sarah*]. Ye'll go as far as the shore, Bob.

BOB. Aye; I'll go.

MARTIN [*putting on his oilskins*]. An' young Harry Davidson along o' Steve in your place.

BOB. I know.

SARAH [*helping Martin, but addressing Bob*]. Call Mary to fetch your gear, son. It's in the kitchen.

BOB. Didn't ye hear I weren't goin'? Mine's a sort o' soft job.

MARTIN. Lay off that, Bob; it don't help matters. We'll need ye on the beach.

BOB. Aye. [*Mockingly, as he crosses to up left*] Cap'n o' the shore crew! [*He exits to the street.*

MARTIN [*shouting after him*]. Tell 'em I'm comin'! Make ready to launch! [*Patting Sarah on the shoulder*] Maybe I'll be homealong later.

[He exits to the street. Sarah takes a shawl from a peg and follows him to the door.

SARAH. Ye'd best hurry, Steve.

[She exits. Stephen hesitates, and then takes his things from the peg. Mary enters down left.

MARY. They've gone to the beach?

STEPHEN [*up centre, putting on his oilskins*]. They've gone.

MARY. I could see her rocket from the back window. She's on the Ledge three hundred yards out. Aren't you for the boat?

STEPHEN. You know I am.

MARY [*crossing to above the table*]. Then I reckon they'll be waitin'.

STEPHEN. I don't need you to tell me. I'll be ready to take off with her.

MARY [*regarding him curiously*]. Will ye? I ain't so sure.

[*Sue Lawson enters. The wind has increased in strength, and she closes the door with difficulty.*]

SUE. Stephen!—that boat out there——! It means you'll have to go!

MARY [*piling the plates at the table*]. Get down to the boat, Steve. I'll stay with her.

STEPHEN. That's kind o' you. You go your ways, Mary, an' leave others to go theirs.

MARY [*moving down right of the table*]. Yes, I know; an' it's plain which way yours leads. Ye've chosen a good moment to break with the sea. Drowned men's cries for your weddin' bells——

SUE [*moving down left-centre*]. I won't listen to you! You've no right to say anything—anything!

[*She breaks left towards the sofa.*]

MARY. No; I ain't; an' I've no more to say to you, young Miss.

STEPHEN [*moving to above and left of the table*]. Get away from here, Mary! D'ye hear? Get away!

MARY [*slowly*]. I'm goin'.

[*She goes up in silence to the peg, takes a shawl, puts it over her head, and exits without looking at Stephen or Sue. The howling of the wind is almost continuous throughout the rest of the action.*]

SUE [*moving in to left-centre*]. Why did it come to-night? To-morrow would have been different. It's just an evil fate that brought that ship out there.

STEPHEN [*sullenly, moving slowly down towards Sue*]. What

of it? I've been out afore without bein' told to go. 'Tain't because I'm feared.

SUE. I passed by the beach. The sea's cruel, and breaking over the jetty. It's madness to launch a boat.

STEPHEN. 'Tain't for our reckonin'. If I goes—

SUE [*clinging to him*]. If you go, we'll never be married, Steve. It's me—or that.

STEPHEN. Aye, just when I'd made up my mind to quit it all. It wants four hours to the time o' meetin' we arranged. A lot can happen in four hours.

SUE [*pleading*]. Everything can happen. You can go with the boat and be drowned. The sea can call you for the last time and never let you go to any meeting. At the best, we can seek to mend our broken plans that will never be mended. There's a challenge in it. It says: "Come. You'll go to no woman while I call."

STEPHEN. We'll see! [*Stripping off his oilskins*] Will ye come with me now? While they're launchin' the boat an' the wind whistles for its answer?

SUE. You know what it means. People will say you were afraid.

STEPHEN [*throwing his oilskins over his arm*]. Maybe I am; afraid o' losin' you. [*Gripping her*] But we'll not hear 'em. We'll be in the town, four hours ahead o' what we planned. They'll never get me back then. We'll not even come to the farm, but live our lives out o' sight an' hearin' o' the sea. Will ye come?

SUE. Yes! now, Stephen!

[*Stephen releases her and takes his oilskins to the peg.
The door is forced open by the wind as Bob enters.
Sue retreats a little down left.*]

BOB [*at the door, to Stephen*]. Get down to the 'boat.

STEPHEN [*quietly*]. I ain't goin', Bob.

[*He moves down right-centre.*]

BOB [*following down on his left*]. Get down to the boat, boy. 'Tain't like you to be the last.

STEPHEN [*turning*]. Don't you understand?

BOB [*staring*]. Ye're quittin'? Quittin' with an empty place in the boat, an' men clingin' for their lives to the side of a sinkin' ship?

STEPHEN. Yes.

BOB. By God! ye sneakin' rat——!

STEPHEN [*gripping Bob's shoulders*]. Understand this, Bob; not you nor anyone gets me back. If this had happened yesterday, I should have been with the others, but now I'm goin' along o' Sue, an' ye'll never see me again.

BOB [*wrenching free, almost savagely*]. Get down to the boat afore it's too late an' they takes off one man short.

STEPHEN. Come on, Sue.

[*He jerks his head towards the door. Sue moves up a pace.*]

BOB [*moving back to the door*]. Ye'll not pass here!

[*He is panting somewhat.*]

STEPHEN. You can't stop us.

BOB [*slowly*]. No—I can't stop ye. [*He pauses for breath.*] There was a time when I'd've carried ye there in my arms; now the sea's beaten me an' a woman's beaten you. But there's an empty place in the boat, an' one of us fills it! [*He turns to the peg where his sea-kit used to hang.*] Maybe they didn't reckon I should need it so soon.

[*He makes quickly for the door down left. Even as he reaches it, he leans for support, breathing heavily.*]

STEPHEN. Where are you goin', Bob?

BOB [*opening the door*]. I'm goin' out—with the boat!

[*He staggers off left. Stephen follows quickly, but as he reaches the doorway there is the sound of a heavy fall.*]

STEPHEN. Bob! Bob!

[He goes quickly off left. Sue, alone, goes up to the street door, but checks, and turns to down right-centre, fascinated by the fear of what is happening in the other room. Stephen returns slowly to centre.]

SUE *[after a horrified pause]*. He's not——?

STEPHEN. He's dead. *[Sue sinks into the chair left of the table.]* He brought it on himself.

SUE. Now you must stay to tell them.

STEPHEN. No; I'll not stay. They'll never hear it from me, but maybe they'll guess what caused it. *[Abruptly]* We'll go.

SUE *[staring out front]*. A minute ago he stood at that door—to stop us.

STEPHEN. Aye; just as generations o' Venners have done, but I'll stay for no ghosts. That's finished.

SUE. You'll come with me?

STEPHEN. Wait for me here, Sue, while I get my things. We've got to go far, so far that no one will ever find us—the living or the dead.

SUE. I'll wait.

[Stephen goes off left. After a moment Sue rises. She goes over to the door left, but recoils quickly from what she sees there. She turns, goes up to the window and peers out anxiously, then moves down right-centre again. The door opens, and Sarah comes in. Her face is a mask of tragedy, but she shows no emotion. Sue turns to look at her.]

[In almost a whisper] Mrs Venner, Mrs Venner—it's Bob.

SARAH. Aye.

SUE. You know?

SARAH. I know.

[Stephen comes to the door on left with a case in his hand. He stays there, taut and listening.]

[*Moving slowly to centre*] It was the sea that took Bob, just as it's taken his father.

SUE. Mrs Venner! [*She backs a little down right.*]

SARAH. They launched the boat one short, an' my man was swept off not twenty yards from the shore. He was an old man, strong as he was, an' he couldn't live in that sea. [*She pauses. Then, slowly*] Now they've brought the boat back. [*She takes Stephen's oilskins from the peg.*]

[*Stephen moves almost automatically towards Sarah for his sea-kit. His movements and tones have now the same concentration of purpose his father's had. Sarah holds out his oilskins for him. He puts them on.*]

SUE [*in alarm*]. Stephen! Stephen, you'll not go after all——!

STEPHEN [*as he buttons his oilskins*]. Tell 'em I'm comin'. Make ready to launch!

[*He seems to have forgotten Sue's existence.*]

SUE. You can't go now! You can't! Stephen, you must listen to me! You'll never come back——!

[*Dressed and ready, Stephen makes for the door. Turning, he pats Sarah on the shoulder.*]

STEPHEN. Maybe I'll be homealong later.

[*He opens the door and goes out. Sarah follows slowly, but firmly. The wind rises to crescendo. Only Sue remains, staring fixedly at the closed door.*]

CURTAIN

Alison's Island

A COMEDY OF AGES' MEETING

By Harold Brighthouse

CHARACTERS

COLONEL LORIMER

AUBREY HARPER

BILL HAMMERSLEY

JAIKES

· URSULA HARPER

· MRS JAIKES

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton
Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New
York*

Alison's Island

Colonel Lorimer's house on an island of the Outer Hebrides.

The scene is the dining-room, panelled, lighted by oil-lamps. Nothing has been changed in this room since 1900, and its furnishings go back earlier: a gracious, mellow room of, whatever its age, an age of courtesy. Door, left; fireplace, right; windows, centre, across which heavy curtains are drawn. On the table, a decanter of port, three glasses, biscuits, but no laid meal.

Colonel Lorimer is a picturesque figure—a tall, hale man of eighty, straight, with a suggestion of open-air vigour. His white hair is still abundant, and his white moustache stands out from a red-brown face. He wears the faded dress uniform of the Boer War period.

This, evidently, is an occasion. He stands with a miniature in his hand. Murmuring "Alison," he reverently kisses the miniature, then places it on the table. He consults his watch, a hunter. Keeping it in his hand, he rings the bell and sits. At once Jaikes, his factotum, enters. The man is but little younger than the master, and shows his age more. He wears, to mark the occasion, not butler's clothes, but a gentleman's dress suit of 1900 cut, rusty.

LORIMER. Hard upon the hour, I think, Jaikes.

JAIKES. Yes, sir.

LORIMER [*watch in hand, snaps cover to, pockets it*]. Ah! [Rises.] Mr Jaikes, I'm glad to see you. [*Shakes hands.*] Does Mrs Jaikes honour us?

JAIKES. Yes, sir. She is outside.

LORIMER. Sir?

JAIKES. Colonel Lorimer, then.

LORIMER. That is better. Let us not keep our guest waiting, Mr Jaikes.

JAIKES. No . . . No . . . But, sir,—Colonel—the fact is Mrs Jaikes is not so young as she was, and—

LORIMER. That, surely, is the common lot. I trust she is not going to disappoint me.

JAIKES. Not completely, but I fear—well, she requires humouring and—

LORIMER. I hope, Mr Jaikes, that I shall never be found lacking in courtesy to a lady. Will Mrs Jaikes come in?

[Jaikes opens the door and beckons. Mrs Jaikes, who probably could not get into a dress she wore in 1900, is in a housekeeper's best black.]

[Shaking hands, gravely bowing over it] I am deeply honoured, Mrs Jaikes.

MRS JAIKES. There's a thing I will say, sir.

LORIMER. Sir, Mrs Jaikes?

MRS JAIKES. Colonel Lorimer, then, if you will have it so. Jaikes disapproves my saying this, but it's been on the tip of my tongue to say it this fifty year, and say it I will before I die.

LORIMER. We will not speak of your dying, Mrs Jaikes. I trust that event is many, many years away. But say what you wish.

MRS JAIKES. It's those glasses. The sinful waste.

LORIMER. Glasses?

MRS JAIKES. When you drink her memory you throw the glass away. You make me do the same.

LORIMER. Make? But I exercise no compulsion, Mrs Jaikes.

MRS JAIKES. You expect it, and I've done it. And I'll say this now; it's against nature to see good glass broken wilfully.

LORIMER. And all these years you've suffered!

MRS JAIKES. Well, there, sir—Colonel—I have. I can't abide the waste.

LORIMER. It is a custom to shatter the glass from which one has drunk such a toast as to-night's. But it gives pain to one of my guests. It is enough. We will forget the custom.

MRS JAIKES. And there'll be no more of the old glass left to break if this goes on. It can't last for ever.

LORIMER. Nor can we, Mrs Jaikes. But you had only to open your mouth. A custom which offends a lady is a bad custom, self-condemned. But it is after midnight. Once again, my two old friends, I have the privilege and the very great honour of welcoming you on the anniversary of my wedding in this house to which I brought my bride. [*Leading Mrs Jaikes to the table and seating her*] It is to you two, and especially, my dear Mrs Jaikes, to you, I owe that I have been able through all these years of my long widowhood to keep so freshly green the memory of my girl-bride. You were her maid when she was with us; on you devolved the duty, the almost sacred duty, of keeping her apartments and her wardrobe as they were when she came to this lonely house of mine fifty long years ago. For your devoted service to that charge I can never sufficiently thank you, nor can I hope to express my gratitude to you both for the exile to this island to which you have so patiently submitted. To-day, as in the first minutes of this hallowed date for so many years, I ask you both, my friends, to drink with me to her memory. Mrs Jaikes, Mr Jaikes—to Alison Lorimer!

JAIKES

MRS JAIKES

} [*standing*]. To Alison Lorimer.

[*They drink. Lorimer is about to fling his glass away, looks at Mrs Jaikes, checks himself, and puts his glass on the table, evidently pained. Mrs Jaikes watches him and throws her glass into the fireplace.*]

LORIMER. Mrs Jaikes!

MRS JAIKES. Yes, Colonel Lorimer, I know. But there is one thing hurts me more than waste, and that is to see that look on your face.

LORIMER. I apologize profoundly for betraying my feelings. Incredibly stupid of me.

MRS JAIKES. Won't you—please? [*Indicates his glass.*]

LORIMER [*throwing it—Jaikes throws his*]. I believe you have the tenderest heart in the world, Mrs Jaikes. You were worthy to be her maid—the sweetest bride man ever had. The gods loved Alison too well; she died young— young in the fair freshness of her radiant bloom. She died—but for me, for us, she lives always. [*Raising the miniature, addressing it*] Alison, I am an old man now. I have kept you waiting overlong, but it cannot be much longer before God calls me to your side. [*Pockets the miniature.*] But I forget my duties and my guests. Mrs Jaikes, I have kept you standing. Pardon an old man's inconsiderateness. [*She sits. He offers her biscuits.*] You will honour me? [*Motions Jaikes to sit.*]

MRS JAIKES. Nowadays at this hour—— [*Hesitates.*]

JAIKES. Mrs Jaikes refers to her indigestion.

LORIMER. I would add no burden to that I have imposed by keeping you from your bed.

MRS JAIKES. Food does lie heavy late at night. There's no denying it.

LORIMER. Your prudence is beyond all praise. I think, Mr Jaikes, we cannot do better than to follow Mrs Jaikes's example. Shall we rise from the table and play a game of cribbage?

MRS JAIKES. If I have a passion, it is for cribbage.

LORIMER. Oh, do I touch you this time, Mrs Jaikes? [*Jaikes is making to get the table out. Lorimer checks him.*] Allow me, Mr Jaikes. [*Places the card-table by the fire, sets a chair for Mrs Jaikes.*] Mrs Jaikes?

MRS JAIKES. Thank you, Colonel Lorimer. [*They sit.*]

LORIMER. Will you cut? [*They cut.*] Ah, you deal, Mr Jaikes. [*Jaikes deals, very slowly.*] Did ye ever hear tell of a game called Bridge, Mrs Jaikes?

MRS JAIKES [*severely*]. They play it in London, I believe.

LORIMER [*wickedly*]. I've played it myself.

MRS JAIKES. The Lord knows what you don't do when you go to London. I've been saying for fifty years your jaunts and your clubs will be the ruin of you!

LORIMER. It's undeniable that I'm a rip.

MRS JAIKES. Oh, you may laugh at me, but you go tempting the devil every year in London, and one year he'll win. You mark my words. Bridge, indeed!

LORIMER. I'm an immoderate person, Mrs Jaikes. I spend one annual fortnight in London. And a queer place it is to-day. They're tired, tired like a boat's crew at the end of a gruelling race. Worse than that, some of them. They're fever-stricken to the very soul.

MRS JAIKES. You're better at home.

LORIMER. Ah! But I can still get vintage port at my club, Mrs Jaikes. I can still meet men who know one end of a horse from another. Don't you like a holiday from looking after me?

MRS JAIKES. We're worried silly every minute you're away.

LORIMER. Oh, come! And you a pair of old Londoners yourselves!

JAIKES. That's long ago.

LORIMER. I believe you like my island, Mr Jaikes.

JAIKES. We have grown to love it.

LORIMER. It's a satisfying place, a contenting sort of place. But I see the cards are dealt. Shall we play?

[*They pick up the cards. There is a cry from centre of*
"Hullo."

[*He throws the cards down.*] God bless my soul, what's that?
 [*He goes to the window, opens the curtain upon darkness.*] Fog.
 Can't see a thing. [*Cry, off, of "Help!"*] Mrs Jaikes, I
 deplore the abandonment of our game, but——

MRS JAIKES. Is it a boat on the rocks?

LORIMER. I'm afraid so. [*Speaking now as master to servant*] Beds, if you please, and anything else likely to be needed. [*Mrs Jaikes runs out.*] Bustle, man, bustle. Get the front door open. [*He hunts in a sideboard drawer.*] Torch. There should be a torch in——

[*Knocking at the front door, off left. Lorimer hurries out, passing the slow-moving Jaikes, who hovers by the door looking into the hall.*]

[*Off left*] Are you all ashore? All safe?

AUBREY [*off left*]. We're due to freeze in about two minutes.

[*Enter Aubrey Harper, in short sleeves, carrying his wife Ursula, who wears his jacket over her wet clothes. Bill Hammersley follows, and Lorimer comes last.*]

LORIMER [*though they are in*]. Come in, come in. Use my house as if it were your own.

[*Nothing very serious can have happened to a lady whose hair has not been disturbed by water, but certainly Ursula is angry. These three are, no doubt, pleasant young moderns, but the pleasantness is not now apparent.*]

URSULA [*as if continuing a tirade*]. And no better sense than to drive a motor-boat through fog as if there were nothing to hit till you reached New York.

AUBREY. I tell you I was going dead slow, but——

URSULA. Yes? That's why the boat sank, and if you don't put me down, I——

LORIMER [*moves a chair to the fire*]. Might I suggest the fireside until arrangements can be made?

[*Aubrey puts her in the chair, and she finds Jaikes at her elbow with a glass.*]

URSULA. What's that?

JAIKES. Whisky, madam.

URSULA. I don't believe it. [*Drinks.*] Yes, I do. A cigarette could help, too.

AUBREY. In my left coat pocket.

[*Ursula tries, and withdraws her hand from, presumably, a clammy mess.*]

URSULA. Ugh!

BILL [*displaying a ruined packet*]. Mine are the same.

LORIMER. To my deep regret, though I could offer cigars, I have no cigarettes.

URSULA. Does it matter? A little thing like that on top of everything else that's happened to me . . . [*Jaikes has poured whisky into a second glass and is silently offering it. She exchanges an empty for a full glass. Her thanks are to say*] You're human.

LORIMER. Won't you gentlemen come to the fire? [*Rings.*] I am having beds prepared, but they may be a little time yet.

AUBREY. We're disgraceful, sir, throwing ourselves on your hospitality in the middle of the night. Could—could we know whom we have to thank?

LORIMER. My name is Lorimer.

AUBREY. I'm Aubrey Harper. [*Then, introducing*] Colonel Lorimer. My wife. Bill Hammersley.

[*Jaikes provides whisky for the men. Enter Mrs Jaikes.*]

URSULA. Good lord! It's the ghost of Queen Victoria.

LORIMER [*ignoring that*]. Are the rooms ready, Mrs Jaikes?

MRS JAIKES. And me single-handed, sir? I'll want half an hour.

URSULA. Why worry about bed? Are there any clothes

going? I mean, when a girl's been shipwrecked what does she want to go to bed for?

AUBREY [*taking her half-empty glass from her before she realizes what he is doing*]. Look, haven't you perhaps had? . . .

URSULA. Oh! I appeal to heaven! Was there ever a fouler insult piled on injury?

MRS JAIKES [*tactfully, she supposes*]. There are my clothes, madam.

URSULA. Thanks. I'd just hate to rob you.

[*Mrs Jaikes sniffs with a 'Beggars mustn't be choosers' air.*]

LORIMER. Of course. To be sure, Mrs Jaikes. Obviously unsuitable.

MRS JAIKES. This isn't—London, sir.

LORIMER. No. Our resources are not abundant. Still, I think you have some ladies' raiments put away, Mrs Jaikes, in the blue room.

MRS JAIKES. The blue room! But——

[*She is the personification of indignation.*]

LORIMER [*apologetically, to Ursula*]. Not, I apprehend, of very modern fashion, but perhaps in this emergency you will bear with their antiquity and the scent of lavender, which also, I fear, is not of the mode to-day.

MRS JAIKES. You mean that I'm to get——

LORIMER [*sharply*]. You know the clothes I mean.

MRS JAIKES. Yes, sir. But they——

LORIMER. They were my wife's, and I have kept them. Perhaps, all unknowingly, it was for this I kept them.

MRS JAIKES. It wasn't, then. It was because——

LORIMER. Hush, if you please. I believe she would have wished it. They are to clothe a . . . castaway Whom fate has brought to my door on this day that is Alison's day. Alison would not have had me deny her all—all I have.

You will oblige me by taking Mrs Harper to the blue room, Mrs Jaikes.

MRS JAIKES [*hesitates, then*]. Yes, sir. Will you come this way, please? [*Exeunt Ursula and Mrs Jaikes.*]

LORIMER. Jaikes, you will lay out clothes for the gentlemen. Anything of mine is at their disposal, and perhaps some of yours will provide the better fit. [*Exit Jaikes.*]

AUBREY. We're keeping you up, sir.

LORIMER. No. Not to-night. This chances to be a private occasion when I don't wear everyday clothes and don't go to bed at every-night time. And now tell me, Mr Harper, were you badly off your course when you rammed my island?

AUBREY. No, sir. [*Trying hard not to boast*] Well, path-finding for Bomber Command . . . so a bit of marine navigation wasn't beyond me.

LORIMER. You intended to come here?

BILL. The attraction is your remoteness.

LORIMER. Indeed? Am I harbouring fugitives?

AUBREY. You're entitled to take a poor view of us. Especially of my wife.

LORIMER. In my day, sir, a man defended his wife.

AUBREY. I am defending her. Did my wife just now impress you favourably?

LORIMER. I never expect a woman to be amiable after she's been shipwrecked.

AUBREY. Shipwrecked! With her hair dry! Or didn't you notice that? But as a matter of fact she has more to complain of than a minor accident to a motor-boat. I kidnapped her.

LORIMER. She is your wife?

AUBREY. Of course she's my wife.

LORIMER. Then will you tell me the circumstances in which a husband can kidnap his own wife?

AUBREY. She was running to a solicitor. To start a divorce. The idea was that time—time and the Hebrides—would give her back her sense of proportion.

LORIMER [*angrily*]. Divorce? Divorce is something of which I do not take the modern view.

AUBREY. No more do I when it's a case of Ursula wanting to divorce me.

LORIMER. Have you deserved to lose her?

BILL. That's rather where I come in. It's because of my responsibility that—

LORIMER. My mind's confused. Two men and a woman: one man her husband; the other—what are you people who've invaded my house? I know; nobody can read a paper and not know that there are men and women of to-day to whom honour is a by-word and decency a jest. Is my house on this of all nights soiled by shamelessness?

BILL. Oh, really, no, sir. I'm not a bit like that.

LORIMER. You have just admitted responsibility, sir. For what? What are you?

BILL. I'm one of the back-room boys.

LORIMER. One of—! [*Enter Jaikes.*] What is it, Jaikes?

JAIKES. I have laid out clothes for the gentlemen, sir—doing the best I could.

LORIMER. Then go. Go! When you come back . . . but go.

AUBREY. Can't we at least assure you that—?

LORIMER. You have tired me. Go.

[*Exeunt Bill, Aubrey, and Jaikes, who is waved aside by Lorimer.*

[*Lorimer sits by the fire, an old, exhausted man.*

And on your night, Alison . . . Alison . . . Alison.

[*He dozes. Enter Ursula, dressed in the mode of any ninety-ish year when women's clothes were beautiful. It is night: she has therefore, and whatever*

the opinion of Mrs Jaikes, chosen an evening dress—a quiet one. The late Mrs Lorimer had no daring clothes.

Alison! Alison! You have come back to me! But not in anger? You are not angry because I have let your exquisite clothes be fingered by alien hands?

URSULA. Alien! I'm——

LORIMER. They came to me to-night—your night, Alison—out of the sea and the cold. I could do no other than I did, and you look so strangely at me. Did I do wrong and make you angry?

URSULA. I don't quite understand. But if you're talking to me, I'm not angry.

LORIMER. No. You haven't it in you to be ungenerous. My wife, my girl-bride. You are just as you were when you went away from me, my beautiful, when the sun set and the long night came. I'm seeing you now as I saw you then, so bright, so clearly, Alison, not through a mist as you usually come to me, but nearer, as if the mist had rolled away and I'm seeing things about you that I'd forgotten. You are more lovely than I had dared to recollect, more perfect than I had it in my gross man's mind to believe. Why do you come so wonderfully now, Alison? Dear God, is this the end? Do you come to fetch me, Alison, my sweet? I am ready, aye, ready and over-ready for the call. Do I come with you now, my bride? [*Ursula shrinks back with a little gesture of denial.*] Not yet? I still have work to do on earth? Yes, yes, I see. These castaways, these strangers in my house. Alison, I'm glad. I'm glad you give me leave to do what I had hoped to do. I was not sure; it seemed to me that I was arrogant and full of pride to think that I could be of use to them. But I take confidence from you, I have the strength of your assurance that I shall not fail. Yes, Alison, it is worth while in such a cause to stay

from you a little longer and to linger on the earth. I'll do it, Alison, I'll do it now with faith and strength from you, and when it's done, then may I come to you? May the long, long waiting end and the wanderer come home—to you? [*He approaches her pleadingly. Ursula, terrified, hesitates, then turns as if to go upstairs.*] Alison, why don't you speak?

URSULA [*looking upstairs, hoping for some one to come, then*]. Because it seems like interrupting a prayer. [*Comes to him, gently touches his arm.*] Mr Lorimer, were you asleep? My name is Ursula. I think perhaps you were mistaking me for some one else. I'm one of your guests.

[*Lorimer passes his hand over his forehead.*]

LORIMER. I—I have to ask forgiveness. I was dreaming, but you are so like, so wonderfully like the most beautiful woman I have ever known, my wife.

URSULA. The clothes deceived you.

LORIMER. They were her clothes.

URSULA. Yes. I'll remember that. I'll do nothing to disgrace them.

LORIMER. I feel sure of it. They belong to an age when women, perhaps, had more decorum. I hope you do not find them comfortless?

URSULA. Oh, no. They're—they're all right. Dare say they'll do me good. I'm feeling prim already.

LORIMER. Prim? Were we prim because we were polite? I assure you the wearer of those clothes was never lacking in vivacity. She had restraint, but there was sap in her veins. Would you call it prim to slide down banisters?

URSULA. Did she do that?

LORIMER. We were young, on our honeymoon. Life flamed for us two like a beacon in the night, and then the light went out and left me to the night.

[*Ursula puts her hand out impulsively. Lorimer bows over it, kisses it. But this episode has emotionally*

exhausted him: needing to be alone, he makes a gesture of apology and exits. Ursula watches him go, then sees the miniature and picks it up.

URSULA. Am I like that? [*Looking at her dress*] I am like that. [*Looks round.*] Oh, Lord, what's a room without a looking-glass? Glass? Did somebody say glass?

[Puts the miniature down. Pours whisky. Enter Aubrey and Bill. Their clothes, from the wardrobes of Lorimer and Jaikes, are misfits, but not comic. Aubrey crosses quickly and gets hold of the glass before Ursula drinks.]

AUBREY. Oh, I think not.

URSULA. Don't you? Well, I—*[there is a struggle for possession of the glass]* Aubrey, if you spill one drop on this dress, I'll murder you.

AUBREY. What's so wonderful about it?

URSULA. You wouldn't understand in a million years.

BILL *[interposing, and, in fact, getting the glass]*. Allow me. William the Peacemaker.

URSULA. Peace!

BILL. You may be right. In the black lexicon of to-day the word peace is not written. All the same, we are now dry and warm, and we have a situation to discuss.

URSULA. Situation? Two wolves and a lamb.

BILL *[who is now between her and the door]*. Mrs Harper, ever since we left London I've been apologizing to you for the consequences of a mishap, and——

URSULA *[advancing: he backs]*. You made the consequences. You and he. You dragged a defenceless woman the length of two countries. You exposed her to the perils of the sea. You nearly drowned her, and neither of you blithering idiots had the elementary gumption to keep a cigarette dry.

[Bill backs from her till the wall below door prevents further retreat. Lorimer returns.]

Colonel Lorimer, I claim your protection.

LORIMER. In my small way, Mrs Harper, I give the law on this island.

AUBREY. And I'm quite sure, sir, that you don't judge without hearing. I—I suppose my name conveys nothing to you? Aubrey Harper.

URSULA. It wouldn't. *[Sitting, hard.]*

AUBREY. I'm a novelist. At least, I write novels. I hadn't got far with it before the war, and then——

BILL *[taking charge]*. Four years in the R.A.F. and a man's forgotten. So I took control. My full name is William Warwick Hammersley, and, believe me, Warwick the King-maker made fewer kings than me.

LORIMER. You must indeed be influential, Mr Hammersley.

BILL. I am a Press agent. In that capacity I undertook to make such a stink—I mean, to evoke such interest in Aubrey's new novel as would make it a best-seller not only in England but in America, thus at one stroke establishing Aubrey and performing the high and patriotic function of bringing dollars into England. Is that a worthy cause, or isn't it?

LORIMER. As an objective it has some speculative merit.

BILL. But I made a mistake. I admit it. I have tried so hard to make Mrs Harper realize that Press agency is a poster-art. It is the art of legitimate exaggeration. I assert that when I attacked that novel in the pages of the *Daily Plutograph* and put the words "Bomber's Bombshell" at the top of my article, I had a headline to be proud of.

URSULA. Are you still proud?

BILL. I am crestfallen, and you know it. I am the unhappy victim of my own zeal. *[Appealing to Lorimer]* But

I do ask you, sir, is his a face to sell a hundred thousand copies? So, I used every ounce of my influence and the photograph of the beautiful . . . I repeat, the beautiful . . . in print, and in verity the beautiful Mrs Harper appeared with my article.

LORIMER. And very properly she resented the vulgarity.

BILL. In this day and age, sir, it is usually considered a distinction to have one's photograph published. [*Ursula moves angrily.*] But Mrs Harper is a lady of exquisite sensitiveness, and you are right: she did resent it.

URSULA. Go on, Mr Hammersley, go on. What did my exquisite sensitiveness resent?

BILL. A quotation from the novel. Unfortunately the paper printed it in italics.

URSULA. You understand, Colonel Lorimer? In italics by the side of my photograph. Like a signpost pointing at *me*—Mrs Harper. The beautiful Mrs Harper; and next to me, in italics, "Love is a disease: marriage is the cure." What do you think of that?

LORIMER. I think it's the most outrageous lie that ever stained paper. Did you write it?

AUBREY. It is not outrageous. It's an incidental, flippant epigram from a novel, put in the mouth of an unpleasant person. If a novelist writes about an atheist, does that make him an atheist? Am I a drunkard because I've described one, or a murderer because I've examined the psychology of murder? I was writing about a cad and a cynic, and it's a perfectly good piece of characterization to make him say that love's a disease.

LORIMER. The trouble seems not to be your literature—if such a novel can be called literature—but——

BILL. It is not such a novel. Nine-tenths of it are as harmless as a kitten, with a few, just a few bits to give plausibility to my attack.

LORIMER. Your scurrilous attack.

BILL. Certainly. My little masterpiece of scurrility. A superb advertisement of the book.

LORIMER. Which you deliberately associated with Mrs Harper's photograph.

BILL. Don't I keep on admitting a blunder?

URSULA. A blunder! Mrs Harper: marriage is the cure for love.

BILL. But it doesn't mean——

URSULA. Then why did every woman I know ring up and ask what I was doing about it? Obviously, I want a divorce. I simply couldn't not want a divorce.

AUBREY. Every woman!

[*Lorimer turns from Ursula, goes to the window.*]

URSULA. Well, there were——

AUBREY. Yes, our cat and another.

LORIMER. That word 'divorce' comes strangely from a lady wearing Alison's clothes. I could doubt if she ever heard the word.

URSULA. We can't live in the past, Colonel Lorimer.

LORIMER [*turning from the window*]. And yet, you know, queer things still happen on Scottish isles. Even clothes may have their influence. When you were alone with me you were softer, gentler than——

URSULA. I was keeping better company than I am now.

LORIMER [*bows*]. Thank you. But I hope that is a temporary opinion. Did you suffer greatly from physical violence on your journey?

AUBREY. Good lord, she——

URSULA. I was kidnapped.

LORIMER. So your husband said.

URSULA. I'd been saying it for seven hundred miles, and every mile of them evidence for divorce.

LORIMER. In what way?

URSULA. Legal cruelty.

LORIMER. I'm not a lawyer. It does occur to me that cars can't be driven non-stop for seven hundred miles. Couldn't you at some stop have called the attention of a policeman—or, indeed, any passer-by, any garage man—to your plight?

URSULA. Why should I when every mile piled up the evidence? With a shipwreck on top of the rest. Isn't a shipwreck cruelty?

LORIMER. I should call sea-fog an act of God. As far as you know, Mr Harper, what condition is your boat in?

AUBREY. Finished. We only just left her before she sank.

LORIMER. Excellent.

BILL. Excellent?

LORIMER. My launch is not at your disposal, Mr Hammersley, until I care to put it so.

BILL. But that can't be the only . . . Surely there's some steamship service . . . some time.

LORIMER. None, Mr Hammersley. And, unless I'm mistaken, the third arm of a Press agent is a telephone.

BILL. There can't be no telephone.

LORIMER. Deprived of a telephone, what are you, Mr Hammersley?

BILL. Why, I . . . I . . .

LORIMER. I will tell you shortly. [*Turns to Aubrey.*] You chose this island for its remoteness, did you not? Your intention, you said, was to keep Mrs Harper here till she recovered her sense of proportion. We have, on the other hand, the effulgent sanity of Messrs Harper and Hammersley.

AUBREY. I dare say we're all a bit of post-war.

LORIMER. Mine were smaller wars than yours. But by heaven, gentlemen, we were not sunk by victory. You, Hammersley—what a fall! Chicanery as a profession. You,

Harper, with this fantastic abduction of . . . How on earth did you get petrol?

BILL. Oh, ingenuity.

LORIMER. Bah! First you tell a pack of lies in a newspaper—

BILL. Oh, no, I won't stand for that. That isn't lying: it's salesmanship. It's persuasion. It's suggestion. It's the art of—

LORIMER. Conspiracy.

BILL. All right. Every profession is a conspiracy against the laity.

LORIMER. Quotation for quotation, Mr Hammersley. There is a tide in the affairs of men. And in the present tide of England, sir, two unskilled, inefficient farm-labourers are worth more than one novelist and one Press agent. Reality is smothered by the pavement-stones of cities, but here—

URSULA [*going, protectively, to stand in front of Aubrey*]. No! You can't do that to Aubrey.

LORIMER [*visibly concealing satisfaction*]. Why not? My small farm is short of labour, and chance has sent me two playboys who—

BILL. Sir, I am not a playboy. I'm a busy professional man on short leave from strenuous endeavour.

LORIMER. The best holiday is change of occupation. You are in urgent and spiritual need of blistered hands. You may, of course, prefer not to eat.

[*Enter Mrs Jaikes: she stands by the door awaiting attention.*]

[*To Ursula*] As for you, I dare say my housekeeper will find you work for the next few weeks that won't ruin your hands.

URSULA [*humbly; all indignation spent*]. Did you say weeks?

LORIMER. We do nothing in a hurry on a farm. Work is

slow, painstaking, thorough. Also it is pain-giving to those unused to it. [*Suitable apprehensions from Bill and Aubrey.*] Yes, Mrs Jaikes?

MRS JAIKES. It's about the guest-rooms, sir.

LORIMER. And when it should have been that game of cribbage. How altogether too bad to have these midnight labours imposed on you!

MRS JAIKES [*drily*]. That's why I raise the question, sir. Is it two rooms wanted, or is it three?

URSULA. My husband and I will have the same room, if you please, Mrs Jaikes.

AUBREY [*elatedly*]. But that means——

LORIMER. We are not dull to its meaning, Mr Harper.
[*He turns to hide his satisfaction.*]

MRS JAIKES. There are nice fires burning in two rooms, if you will——

LORIMER. Yes. Good-night. [*Abruptly dismissing them.*]

BILL [*resentfully*]. Good-night. [*Marching erectly out.*]

[*Aubrey and Ursula hesitate, then start for the door.*]

[*Lorimer calls Ursula back. Mrs Jaikes remains by the door.*]

LORIMER. Mrs Harper.

URSULA. Yes. [*Goes to him.*]

LORIMER [*takes her hand*]. Thank you, my dear. You have justified [*touching her sleeve*] Alison's dress.

[*Ursula kisses him and goes out quickly. Aubrey follows her out. Mrs Jaikes is going, but——*]

Mrs Jaikes.

MRS JAIKES. Sir?

LORIMER. You conceal your feelings badly, Mrs Jaikes. You heard me speak of these people's being here for weeks. You shuddered.

MRS JAIKES. I'm sure I——

LORIMER [*sits, at the table*]. In the morning tell Macdonald

to have the launch ready. They're leaving. It would be good for them if I did what I said I'd do. But it would not be good for us. It would not be good enough for Alison's island.

MRS JAIKES. I'm glad you're sending them away.

LORIMER. And when they get to London they'll amuse their friends by telling of a lunatic old man sitting in a lonely house in the Western Isles. [*His fingers find the miniature: he picks it up.*] But, do you know? I don't think they will. I think they will remember, to their advantage, the hours they spent with Alison. [*Pockets the miniature.*] We are too old to give them more than a few hours.

MRS JAIKES. And the fog has lifted, sir. Macdonald will get them away in the morning.

LORIMER [*rising, moving doorwards, winding his watch*]. Sooner or later, fogs always lift. That's a comforting fact, Mrs Jaikes. Good-night.

[*Exit Lorimer. Mrs Jaikes turns out the lamp.*]

CURTAIN

Liberation

By Norman Holland

CHARACTERS

MICHELLE MARSAN

LOUISE ROUGET

JEANNE MARSAN

PHILIPPE MARSAN

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to the International One-Act Play Theatre, 60
Earlsfield Road, London, S.W.18*

Liberation

This is the living-room of a middle-class house in a town in Northern France. There is a door in the right-hand wall, leading to the hall and the front door. Another door, in the rear wall, leads to the kitchen and the rest of the house. Also in the rear wall is the fireplace, which, since it is summer, is covered by an iron plate. On the mantelpiece, above the fireplace, is a central clock flanked by two candlesticks and sundry ornaments. In the left wall is a window through which streams the bright sunlight of a summer morning.

There are pictures and photographs on the walls, and the furnishings are rather old-fashioned. The essentials are a table set latitudinally, left of centre, with a chair behind it and another at each end. On the table is used crockery and the remains of a meal.

At rise the room is empty. Immediately there is a loud knocking at the front door. Through the central door Michelle Marsan comes into the room. She is a pretty young woman, wearing a skirt and blouse, with a gay scarf, worn turban-fashion, on her head. Although her clothes are neither new nor expensive, she wears them with an air, and gives the impression of being superior to her surroundings. Her expression indicates that she is badly frightened.

As the knocking is repeated her hand goes to her throat, as if she would stifle the fearful pounding of her heart. With reluctant, dragging steps she crosses the room and goes out by the other door. She is heard opening the street door, and then calls out in a relieved voice :

MICHELLE. Why, Louise! Won't you come in?

[The street door closes, and she comes back into the

room, followed by Louise Rouget. Louise is about Michelle's age and is dressed in outdoor clothes. As they come in Michelle says anxiously:

What is it, Louise? Is Pierre all right?

LOUISE [*comfortingly*]. Of course he is—he's playing very happily with my Jean, and Mother is keeping an eye on them. But he keeps asking for Jo-Jo.

MICHELLE. Oh, yes, I'll get Jo-Jo for you. I forgot it when I brought him across. I hope he hasn't been crying for it.

LOUISE. Oh, no! He just asked for it—the way he does. He's a good child.

MICHELLE [*nodding her head*]. Yes, he is a good child. Is that strange, Louise, that he should be a good child?

LOUISE [*gently*]. No, of course not. You've brought him up well.

MICHELLE. I've done my best. At least, I owed him that. Won't you sit down?

LOUISE. Yes, but I must not stay long. [*She sits on one of the chairs at the table.*] Mother is waiting until I get back—she's doing the shopping this morning.

MICHELLE [*hesitantly*]. Will you . . . will you have a cup of coffee?

LOUISE [*also hesitant*]. Why . . . yes. Thank you.

MICHELLE [*hurrying out through the central door*]. I won't keep you a moment.

[While she is out of the room Louise looks about her, and her eyes linger with distaste on the uncleared table. Michelle comes back with cup, saucer, and coffee-pot. Placing the cup and saucer on the table in front of Louise, she pours the coffee. All her movements are swift and anxious, as if she fears that Louise will change her mind.]

There you are. Sugar on the table.

LOUISE [*incredulous*]. Sugar?

MICHELLE. It's all right. I can spare it.

LOUISE [*really grateful*]. Thank you.

[She helps herself, and stirs the coffee. Without taking her eyes from the other woman, Michelle sits on the other side of the table and continues to stare at her fixedly. As she drinks Louise becomes aware of this scrutiny and turns to look at Michelle.]

Is anything the matter?

MICHELLE. You must forgive me. But it is so long since anybody accepted anything from me. I've been afraid to ask you. So many people have rebuffed me.

LOUISE. Yes, I know.

MICHELLE. I'd like to thank you, Louise, for all your kindness to me . . . and Pierre.

LOUISE. Oh, it's nothing.

MICHELLE. But it is. To me, it is everything. My own people, Philippe's mother—oh, everybody—turned away from me. Even those who might have wanted to offer a word of kindness were too afraid of the others. There's been nobody, except you. You were the only person—

LOUISE. But, then, I've only myself to please—that's one of the compensations of being a widow. Perhaps the only one. Forget about it, Michelle.

MICHELLE. I'll never forget it. Never. Why should you be so good to me?

LOUISE. We were friends at school.

MICHELLE. Not really very good friends. I used to pull your hair.

LOUISE. Then you probably think that a combination of my kind heart and religious beliefs prompts my interest in you and Pierre?

MICHELLE. What else?

LOUISE. Something more than that. I feel very close to

you in your trouble. You see, what happened to you could just as easily have happened to me.

MICHELLE. Oh, Louise! You're only trying to excuse——

LOUISE. I'm not! I'm a woman, I tell you, with feelings and passions like your own. Your captain attracted me from the first moment I saw him.

MICHELLE. You!

LOUISE. Yes, me. I did my best to make him look at me, but he never seemed to see me. He only had eyes for you. If he had looked my way instead of yours, how much better things might have been! All this wouldn't have mattered so much for a widow. . . .

MICHELLE [*wearily*]. I know myself well enough to realize that if it had not been him it would have been another.

LOUISE. I prayed for you last night.

MICHELLE. That was good of you, but quite unnecessary.

LOUISE. Unnecessary? But we all need prayers.

MICHELLE. I am beyond the reach of anyone's prayers.

LOUISE. You're not! You're not! You must not say such things! There's not one of us, Michelle——

MICHELLE. No, no, Louise. I know. I've knelt and prayed with the priest, but it's no use. You can tell here [*she strikes her breast*] if your prayers are heard. [*She rises and walks about nervously.*] Mine are only words echoing, and the priest might just as well save himself the trouble.

LOUISE. Michelle, our prayers are heard. Yours are just as acceptable to God as mine or anybody's. You must never forget that. You have sinned, but you have suffered and repented. God is not unforgiving. He is all-compassionate to the truly repentant. [*She rises from her chair.*] Let us, in the name of the Holy Mother, say a prayer together now.

[*She is about to kneel, but Michelle restrains her.*

MICHELLE. No, Louise. I have forgotten God for too

long. I would know that it was fear and need which prompted my prayers. God would not be deceived.

LOUISE. He would see it as an act of contrition.

MICHELLE [*firmly*]. I am not going to pray.

LOUISE. Very well. But I think you are wrong. [*She sits again. There is a short silence.*] Do you think he will come here right away?

MICHELLE [*again walking nervously to and fro*]. I don't know. I don't know. Ever since I knew he was coming I've been wondering . . . asking myself . . . but I can't think. I keep trying to put myself in his place, but that doesn't help.

LOUISE. Aren't you going to the station?

MICHELLE. And stand among that crowd of other wives? Do you think that they would permit that? Can't you see what would happen the moment I arrived?

LOUISE [*sighing*]. Yes. Yet it seems to me that you're giving the old one her chance. She'll go to the station. She'll be waiting for him.

MICHELLE. Then that will solve everything. At least he'll know before he gets here. That's what I dread most—telling him.

LOUISE. You mean . . . he doesn't know already?

MICHELLE. No. It isn't anything you could tell in a letter—you couldn't begin to explain. Truly, I'm not making excuses. You do see that, Louise?

[*She sits down again.*]

LOUISE. Yes, I see, but I can't understand. Hasn't the old one written to him?

MICHELLE. Evidently not. All his letters have been full of what he intends to do when he gets home. [*With great bitterness*] Of the happy years in front of us.

LOUISE. But why didn't she write and tell him? I should have thought . . .

MICHELLE. How should I know? It wasn't any love of me that held her back. She's a queer woman, Jeanne Marsan. It's for some strange reason of her own. She never liked me—thought I was too flighty for her Philippe. I wouldn't go so far as to say she was glad that all this has happened, but she's derived an odd satisfaction from being proved right. If you could have seen her face that day when she held me——

LOUISE [*raising her hand in protest*]. Please, Michelle! We agreed that we would never talk of that again.

MICHELLE. I'm sorry. But I can't get her face out of my mind.

LOUISE. So that's why you asked me to take Pierre?

MICHELLE. Yes. When you knocked I was hiding away his toys . . . and things. I was hoping for a few minutes with Philippe before I told him . . . just so that I could look at him. A few minutes isn't much out of a lifetime, is it, Louise?

LOUISE. No, Michelle.

MICHELLE. There! I'm pitying myself, and there's no time left for that.

LOUISE [*rising*]. I must go. Could I have Jo-Jo?

MICHELLE [*smiling wanly*]. To be sure—Jo-Jo. [*She goes out by the centre door, and returns immediately with a small doll, which she gives to Louise.*] I'll come across later . . . perhaps.

LOUISE [*turning the doll awkwardly in her hands*]. Michelle, Philippe is a good man.

MICHELLE. You're trying to give me hope. But I'm not deluding myself. I'll hope for no more than those few minutes—it's all I have the right to expect.

LOUISE. Philippe was always so understanding . . . so ready to help anybody in trouble.

MICHELLE. He's been a prisoner of war for five years—that's enough to change any man. No, Louise. There's no

forgiveness for such as me. You'll not persuade me that a miracle is possible.

LOUISE [*near to tears*]. Bless you, Michelle. May God take you into His keeping.

[She suddenly embraces Michelle and kisses her. Weeping bitterly, she turns from Michelle and runs from the room by the door on the right. The street door bangs. Michelle stands quite still for a moment, and then touches her lips where Louise has kissed them. She turns and looks uncomprehendingly about the room. Then she sees the crockery on the table, and goes out by the centre door, returning with a tray. Before she begins to clear the things from the table she lights a cigarette. Having gathered everything on the tray, she goes out again. There is a loud knocking on the street door.]

Michelle comes in again, pauses in the doorway, and strides swiftly to the table, where she crushes out her cigarette in an ash-tray. She draws herself up and, with shoulders squared, goes out into the hall.

The door is heard to open, and then a female—not feminine—voice asks, "May I come in?" The door closes, and Michelle, looking very puzzled, returns with Jeanne Marsan, one of those durable, vital Frenchwomen of middle age who might serve as a model for La Patrie. She also wears a scarf on her head, but in her case it is worn loosely and tied under her chin. She halts near the doorway soon after coming into the room, but Michelle, still looking at Jeanne, continues to retreat before her until she is checked by a chair. The two women glare at each other with hatred for a moment—the hatred on Michelle's face blended with fear.

JEANNE. Aren't you going to ask me to sit down, daughter-in-law?

MICHELLE. It's your house. You can please yourself.

JEANNE. Oh, no. It isn't my house. It was my house until it became contaminated. It can only be mine again when it has been cleansed of the influences to which it has been subjected. Aren't you going to ask me to sit down, daughter-in-law?

MICHELLE [*shrugging*]. As you please. Won't you sit down?

JEANNE [*sitting*]. Thank you. [*She looks about the room with the air of one who is revisiting after a long absence. Her expression indicates that her examination leaves her displeased.*] Your curtains need washing. But then, you never were a very diligent housewife, were you?

MICHELLE. I've been busy. There has been sickness in the house.

JEANNE. Oh, yes. I heard about it. The child was ill. Is he better?

MICHELLE. Quite better, thank you. And his name is Pierre.

JEANNE. Indeed? Where is he now?

MICHELLE [*hesitant*]. He's with a friend.

JEANNE. Ah, yes. That was wise of you. Aren't you going to the station to meet Philippe?

MICHELLE. No. You know that I dare not go. [*She moves closer to Jeanne.*] Why have you come here? Haven't you done enough? Did you come to gloat over my misery?

JEANNE. No. Not entirely. I came for several reasons.

MICHELLE. Aren't you satisfied yet? Isn't there any pity in you?

JEANNE [*considering*]. Pity? No. None for you. Some, perhaps, for that boy who went away trusting you and has believed you faithful for five long years in a prison camp.

MICHELLE [*turning away from her*]. Oh, stop it! Stop it!

JEANNE [*continuing as if she had not heard her*]. But pity is something you lost quite early in the Resistance. I've killed men, you know—enemies and traitors.

MICHELLE [*quickly turning to her again*]. Yes, you were kinder to the men.

JEANNE. And, as you know, I've punished women who were enemies of our country. Yes, with these hands.

[*She holds up her large, capable hands and looks at them.*]

MICHELLE. Why don't you go? Why don't you go to the station and meet Philippe?

JEANNE. Me? Go to the station? Oh, no, I couldn't. I'm afraid.

MICHELLE. You? Afraid?

JEANNE. Yes. But not afraid of the other women as you are, nor of the waiting, however long it might be. No, I'm afraid of the first question he would ask me when our greeting was over. I'm afraid of the look on his face when he hears the truth about you. I couldn't answer his question—I couldn't tell him the truth.

MICHELLE [*incredulous*]. You mean that you're not going to tell him?

JEANNE. And have him hate me for ever afterwards? Oh, no. Why do you think I never wrote to tell him? I couldn't bear that my son should hate me for giving him such news.

MICHELLE. But you must tell him! You must!

JEANNE. I shall not tell him. You've wept a little and suffered something, but you haven't really begun to pay for your sins yet. Your real punishment begins to-day—when you tell Philippe of how you spent the five years during which he endured captivity.

MICHELLE. My God! You're inhuman!

JEANNE. Oh, no, I'm not. I'm very human. Isn't it

understandable that I should want the woman who betrayed her husband and her country to suffer the uttermost?

MICHELLE. Don't you think I've suffered enough already? Don't you think I'm suffering now?

JEANNE. You haven't suffered nearly enough. What you experience now is only a little of what I endured when I knew what was between you and . . . that beast. You suffer now for yourself. I agonized for Philippe and myself.

MICHELLE. You're wrong! You're wrong! It is for Philippe, I tell you, that I grieve to-day.

JEANNE. Isn't your grief a little late? A few years too late?

[Wordlessly, Michelle hangs her head and stands limply. Then, suddenly animated, she turns imploringly.]

MICHELLE. Look, if I promise to go away with Pierre as soon as we are permitted to travel—will you tell him, then?

JEANNE. What good would that do? You'd still be in his mind, wouldn't you? You'd still be a tormenting, torturing memory. Have you forgotten how Philippe worshipped you . . . forgotten how deeply sensitive he is? No, that won't do, my girl. You've made bargains before, but you make none with me. There's no easy way out of this.

MICHELLE. I don't seek an easy way out for myself—only for Philippe. Please, for Philippe.

JEANNE *[looking at her with new interest]*. Do you know, I am beginning to think that you are repentant, truly repentant.

MICHELLE *[imploringly]*. Oh, I am! I am!

JEANNE *[musingly]*. That's the worst of repentance—it always comes too late. If people could only repent first . . . and then not do the intended wrong.

MICHELLE. You will?

[For answer Jeanne slowly shakes her head from side to side before she speaks.]

JEANNE. I had not looked for even these signs of grace in

you. It is possible to misjudge a person when she has wronged you and yours very deeply and when you hate her very bitterly. I should have tried to put myself in your place. Your expiation has begun. You can never escape. If you forget—even for a moment—the river purling over the stones will murmur, “Traitor! Traitor!” And if you flee the river’s voice, there will still be the wind to whisper, “Collaborator!”

MICHELLE [*wonderingly*]. But that’s what happens to me when I go out! How could you know?

JEANNE [*nodding her head*]. I know. Whatever you’ve done, you’re still a Frenchwoman. There’s one thing you’ve forgotten.

MICHELLE. What have I forgotten?

JEANNE. That I was young the last time they occupied this town. This is the second time I’ve seen all this happening, but it doesn’t make it any easier to bear. Not for a patriot. Sit down, daughter-in-law. Sit down. We may have quite a long time to wait. [*Michelle sits down.*] What did the letter say? When will he be here?

MICHELLE. It just said that he would arrive some time this morning.

JEANNE. Some time this morning. Oh, well [*she glances at the clock*], then we must wait, my daughter-in-law, and he’ll find us waiting here just as he left us five years ago. Just as he left us. [*An involuntary, moaning cry breaks from Michelle. Jeanne turns and looks at her.*] Did you speak?

MICHELLE. No, I didn’t speak.

[*There is a silence, during which Michelle unconsciously drums with her hand on the table. This proves annoying to the older woman, who glances at her once or twice before she breaks the silence.*]

JEANNE. What was it you said just now—that you would go away with your child? Has it struck you that you might

not be allowed to keep him when the Provisional Government is more firmly established?

MICHELLE. Not keep him?

JEANNE. No. The authorities will hardly permit you to keep him. It would be obvious to them that such a woman as yourself is totally unfitted for the upbringing of a child. Then there is the child to be considered. It would be better for him if he were put in a home, where he need never know who his parents were. There might then be some hope for him if he is to escape his inheritance—the weakness and viciousness of those who casually begot him.

MICHELLE [*springing up from her chair*]. They'll not take him away! They'll not! He's the one person left who loves me, who really needs me. He's the only reason I have for living. If he hadn't got me——

JEANNE. We'll see. Do you think he'll still love you when he knows the truth about himself? About you? Why, already some of the children call after him in the street.

MICHELLE. At whose instigation? Whose? [*She places both hands on the table, leans across it, and, looking straight at Jeanne, says hysterically*] If you try to take Pierre away from me, I'll kill you! Do you hear me? I'll kill you!

JEANNE [*rising*]. What! You poor soft wanton! You threaten me?

[*She faces Michelle across the table, and the two glare their hatred at each other across the space which separates them.*

So you'd kill me?

[*With a short, fierce laugh which has no mirth in it, she goes round the table and seizes hold of Michelle. Michelle struggles, but she is no match for the strength of the older woman, who clutches her in a*

bear hug and begins to squeeze her. As the pressure becomes unbearable Michelle groans with pain.

You'd kill me, would you?

[There is an impatient knocking at the door. Jeanne immediately relaxes her hold and flings Michelle from her. Michelle stands breathing heavily and holding on to the back of a chair.]

Somebody at the door. You'd better answer it.

[With hanging head and dragging step, Michelle starts for the door, with Jeanne watching her narrowly. Outside in the street somebody whistles. This halts Michelle, who stands in an arrested attitude. She winces as if struck by a whiplash as the whistle comes again.]

Ah, I see you remember Philippe's whistle. Go now and greet him.

[The knocking is repeated—louder and more impatiently. Michelle goes from the room into the hall. Jeanne stands tensely—obviously listening intently. The outer door opens. Philippe's voice is heard in a joyous shout: "Michelle! Michelle, my dear!" There is a short pause, during which Jeanne nods her head and smiles bitterly. Then Michelle and Philippe come into the room. He is dressed in a shabby mixture of uniform, but looks reasonably well. As he comes in he radiates excitement and happiness. With a great cry, he rushes to his mother, shedding as he does so a knapsack, which falls to the floor. Jeanne and Philippe enfold each other in a fond embrace. Michelle stoops, picks up the knapsack, and stands watching them. At length he holds his mother at arm's length and smiles at her, but when he speaks there are tears in his voice.]

PHILIPPE. Oh, Mother! It's good to be home!

JEANNE. It's good to have you home again, Philippe.

PHILIPPE [*looking from one to the other*]. And you both look so well. Really very well . . . everything considered. One had heard such stories . . .

JEANNE. You look well too. Doesn't he look well, Michelle?

MICHELLE. Very well. Come and sit down, Philippe.

[*She pushes forward a chair, and puts the knapsack on the table. Philippe sits.*]

PHILIPPE. I've got all sorts of things for you [*he leans forward and pats the knapsack*] in there. But they can wait. First I must hear your news.

JEANNE. Didn't you get any news there, my son?

[*She sits.*]

PHILIPPE. None at all at first. There were all sorts of rumours, and the camps were filled with defeatists. They used to broadcast over the camp radio recordings of speeches by Pétain and Laval. They tried to tell us that everybody had gone over to the Germans, but I always told my comrades that I knew two people who would never give in . . . never compromise. Come, sit down, Michelle. You look quite pale. [*Michelle sits obediently in the other chair at the table.*] It's been a bit of a shock, eh? I suppose you can hardly believe that I'm home at last.

MICHELLE. Yes, it is hard to believe.

JEANNE. But you got some real news later, I suppose?

PHILIPPE [*turning again to her*]. No. No real news until much later. Not until after they started bringing in the British and American fliers. Then when they brought in the prisoners taken after the landings we heard that things were going well. It was then that we heard about the great things done by our own Resistance.

JEANNE. That must have been wonderful, eh, Michelle?

MICHELLE. Wonderful.

PHILIPPE. I tell you it put new heart into us. Until then we thought that nearly all Frenchmen were like Laval and Pétain.

JEANNE. Quite a lot were.

PHILIPPE. But they don't matter. Our friends know now that the Resistance was the true France.

MICHELLE [*rising and speaking doubtfully*]. Could I get you something to eat, Philippe? I didn't know when you would be coming, so I—

PHILIPPE. Nothing to eat just now, thank you. [*He leans over and pats the knapsack.*] We'll have a real feast presently. [*Smiling, he looks up at her.*] If there's a cup of coffee now . . . [*his expression changing*] but if you haven't any, it doesn't matter.

MICHELLE. Oh, we have some coffee. I'll get you a cup.

[*She pauses, irresolute, looking at Jeanne, not daring to speak to her. Suddenly, Jeanne glances up at her.*]

JEANNE. I won't have any, thank you, Michelle.

[*Michelle goes out quickly to the kitchen. Philippe rises, stretches himself luxuriously, and looks fondly about the room. He moves about, indulging in the pleasure of touching familiar things, occasionally picking up some ornament and looking at it. Jeanne observes him narrowly, and, by staring fixedly at a spot above the mantelpiece, she seeks to direct his glance towards it. Eventually he pauses somewhere near the middle of the room and gives it a quick, satisfied appraisal.*]

PHILIPPE. Yes, it's just as I remembered it. [*Again looking about him*]. A bit smaller, though. Ah! The times I've dreamed that I've been back here.

[*His hungry glance still roams the room. Finally it comes to rest at a spot just above the mantelpiece. It is*]

as if his mother had willed him to look in this direction.

But where's my father's picture?

JEANNE. Oh, I took it away with me.

PHILIPPE. Took it away?

JEANNE. Yes, I've got it across at Marie Brouard's place.

PHILIPPE. And what is it doing at Marie Brouard's place?

JEANNE. Where else should it be? I live there.

PHILIPPE. Here, what's this? [*Michelle has returned carrying a tray. Scared by the tone of his voice, she halts just inside the doorway. Angrily Philippe strides towards her.*] What's this? Why does my mother live with Marie Brouard?

[Michelle has no words. She can only stand staring dumbly at him. Philippe turns quickly as Jeanne speaks.]

JEANNE. Don't be so foolish, Philippe. I live there because it is more convenient.

PHILIPPE. Convenient? How could it be more convenient?

JEANNE. Well, you see, Marie and I were in the Resistance together.

PHILIPPE [*gleefully as he goes across to her*]. You were in the Resistance? I might have known. [*Joyfully he hugs her.*] More convenient, eh? A fox needs more than one bolt-hole. And old Marie Brouard! Think of that! [*He laughs.*] Well, well!

[Michelle has placed the tray on the table. Now, steadying her hand with difficulty, she pours the coffee into the cup and adds the sugar.]

MICHELLE. Your coffee, Philippe.

[Still looking at his mother, he backs towards the chair and sits down. As he does so he notices the single cup.]

PHILIPPE. Isn't anybody else having a cup with me?

JEANNE [*quickly*]. We had some just now.

[*Reassured, he begins to drink.*]

PHILIPPE. This is good! You in the Resistance! I can't get over it.

MICHELLE [*sitting again*]. You have every reason to be proud of your mother, Philippe. She and Marie were two of the leaders of the Resistance in the town.

PHILIPPE. I'll bet you had a short way with the collaborators, Mother!

JEANNE. We shot the worst of the men, and we cut the women's hair, didn't we, Michelle?

MICHELLE. Yes, you did.

PHILIPPE. You should have cut their throats.

JEANNE [*chuckling*]. Oh, no. You're too brutal, Philippe. I think we did the right thing. What was it like being a prisoner? Was it very bad, son?

PHILIPPE. Bad enough. Monotonous . . . miserable. Wondering about Michelle and you . . . missing you both. Bad conditions and worse food. It was different, though, when the British and the Americans came. They told us how things were going. Great fellows, the Americans and the British. They used to share their parcels with us. At the end I was on railway-wagon repair, and I was in a camp where there were French, Americans, British, Poles, Russians—oh, every nationality. Then, one day, we woke up to find the guards were pulling out, and we heard that the Americans were advancing towards us, so we marched out to meet them. Just like that!

JEANNE. My poor Philippe! I know you're sparing us a great deal. It must have been terrible!

PHILIPPE [*sighing*]. Ah, well, it's all over. Now we've got to look ahead. We've got to pull this country together. But everything is going to be all right.

JEANNE. I wish I thought so.

PHILIPPE. Of course it is—we've only to work together in the spirit of the Resistance.

JEANNE. It won't be easy, I warn you. The black market to-day is the biggest single industry, and these profiteers think they can dictate—

PHILIPPE. Ah, we'll deal with them—just as you dealt with the collaborators.

JEANNE [*rising*]. Well, I must be getting along.

PHILIPPE [*rising also*]. Going? So soon? But you can't go—I've only just arrived. Why must you go?

JEANNE. There are several things which require my attention.

PHILIPPE [*teasing her*]. How important you've become! What can possibly claim your attention this morning?

JEANNE. For one thing, I must see Marie Brouard . . .

PHILIPPE [*laughing*]. Ah, yes! The Resistance!

JEANNE. And then, you'll have many things to talk over.

PHILIPPE [*with his arm round Jeanne and turning to Michelle*]. There! Haven't I got an understanding mother?

MICHELLE. Yes, indeed.

JEANNE. I must be on my way.

[*She moves towards the door, with Philippe in attendance.*]

PHILIPPE. We'll see you soon?

JEANNE. I'll be back.

PHILIPPE. Yes, don't forget the feast.

[*Jeanne pauses in the doorway and looks back at Michelle.*]

JEANNE. See you later, Michelle.

MICHELLE [*tonelessly*]. See you later.

[*Jeanne goes out into the hall, followed by Philippe. The street door opens. Michelle stands stiffly by the table. Exchanged good-byes are heard. Michelle moves away from the table—farther away from the door. The street door closes noisily. Philippe comes*]

back into the room. His face alight with eagerness, he goes towards Michelle. While some distance away, he holds out his arms in anticipation of an embrace. Momentarily it seems as if she will endeavour to avoid him. Then, as if in spite of herself, she surges forward to meet him and they cling together in a passionate embrace. When they have exchanged an ardent kiss he looks down at her, still holding her in his arms.

PHILIPPE. Michelle! Oh, Michelle, my darling! It has been so long!

[Once more he kisses her, but this time she struggles fiercely in his grasp. Surprised, Philippe releases her, and she steps back, fending him off with outstretched arm as she says:]

MICHELLE. No, no! Please no, Philippe! We must talk.

PHILIPPE *[trying to embrace her again]*. Plenty of time to talk presently.

MICHELLE *[evading him]*. We must talk. Already I have delayed too long. There is something I must tell you at once.

PHILIPPE *[impatiently]*. Can't it wait?

MICHELLE *[firmly]*. No, it can't wait.

[He turns from her and sits sulkily on one of the chairs at the table. For a moment there is a tense silence. Then he looks up at her.]

PHILIPPE. What could be more important than you and me?

MICHELLE. This is about you and me. Why do you think your mother left us just now?

PHILIPPE. You heard her. She knew that we wanted to be alone.

MICHELLE. That wasn't the reason.

PHILIPPE. Of course it was.

MICHELLE. It wasn't.

PHILIPPE. Oh, come, Michelle . . .

MICHELLE. Until to-day, Philippe, your mother had only spoken to me once in four years. And that was when . . .

PHILIPPE. I know you two didn't get on. But surely all this can wait? Bothering me with these stupid domestic quarrels on my first day at home for five years. . . .

MICHELLE. If it was only that! Your mother hasn't spoken to me or walked on the same side of the street . . .

PHILIPPE [*impatiently*]. Oh, please! Please!

MICHELLE [*steeling herself*]. Because, in the first year of the Occupation, I lived with a German officer. Your mother left the house the day she discovered the truth about us and never entered it again until now. [*He is looking at her in fascinated horror, slowly shaking his head from side to side.*] That isn't all. I had a child—a little boy. This morning I left him with Louise Rouget. I was afraid of what might happen to him when you knew. I wasn't in love with Josef—the German—but I was very lonely and I had no belief in eventual victory. I was one of the weak ones. . . .

PHILIPPE. Oh, no, Michelle! No!

MICHELLE. Yes, I was one of the weak ones. I couldn't wait. And even now I can't believe that Josef was a bad man. I never stopped loving you, Philippe, but somehow I never expected to see you again.

PHILIPPE. But your letters . . . the things you wrote to me . . .

MICHELLE. How could I write and tell you? Your mother wouldn't write, because she was afraid that you would hate her. Shall I tell you about the other time your mother spoke to me? It was when we were liberated—when the Resistance rooted out the collaborators. Your mother led them to this house, and she held me while Marie Brouard cut my hair. Then Marie and another held me while

your mother shaved my head. *[He is still staring at her, but now his face has wrinkled into a mask of grief and he is shaken by a terrible sobbing.]* She wasn't very good with a razor, and she cut me several times. And all the time my little boy was watching . . . screaming with terror.

PHILIPPE *[putting his hands over his ears]*. Stop it! Stop it!

MICHELLE *[shouting]*. Take your hands away from your ears! *[Obediently he does so and raises his head to look at her.]* I must finish this! I've got to finish it! Why do you think I wear this turban? Shall I show you what your mother did to me? Shall I show you?

[She raises her hands to the turban.]

PHILIPPE *[covering his face with his hands as he screams]*. No, no! My God, no!

[Convulsively, he throws himself forward on the table, buries his face in his hands, and weeps brokenheartedly. Dazed by her own outburst, she watches him, and her hands fall limply to her sides. Then she stretches one hand towards him, but slowly withdraws it as she realizes that in her touch is no comfort. Her expression, as she looks at him, mingles pity, dread, and utter hopelessness. Then Philippe, with a tremendous effort, checks his sobbing and rises from the chair. He stumbles a few paces in the direction of the central door and, halting, looks round the room again with a glance which clearly says good-bye to every object upon which it lingers. Returning to the table, he picks up his knapsack, slings it over his shoulder, and walks round the table. He has to pass Michelle, and she cringes in anticipation as he approaches. Although he does not look directly at her, he is conscious of the movement, and he pauses long enough to pat her twice on the arm. It is an awkward, clumsy

movement, but it indicates that there is no hatred or anger in his illimitable misery. Still without looking at her, he walks from the room and into the hall with the hesitancy of a blind man. Michelle has watched each stage of his progress with hypnotized attention. The street door opens and closes with echoing finality. In a hoarse, broken voice Michelle says:

MICHELLE. I had my few minutes! I had my few minutes!

CURTAIN

Mr Twemlow is not Himself

By Philip Johnson

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CHARACTERS

SAMUEL TWEMLOW

ALICE TWEMLOW

HATTIE TWEMLOW

MARTHA BRABY

JOE BRABY

MABEL

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton
Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New
York*

Mr Twemlow is not Himself

SCENE I

The scene is the main living-room of Mr and Mrs Samuel Twemlow's house, in the residential part of a fairly large provincial town. It is a quite spacious room, with a door in the back wall, to right of centre, which admits to the hall and the rest of the house, the front door being off right; a tall french window in the middle of the right wall, through which one catches a glimpse of a very formally laid-out garden; and a fireplace left. The furniture is good, and suggests middle-class prosperity, without the least revealing hint of taste or individuality. It is, in fact, just anybody's room who can afford to pay for it. In the middle is a settee, placed at an angle towards down-stage left. Behind this is a small round table upon which is a silver-framed photograph and a highly ornamental plant-pot in which a fern is growing. Upon the settee is a work-basket. Above the fireplace is an easy-chair, at an angle towards down-stage right. Below the fireplace, against the wall, is an arm-chair. Against the back wall, to the left of the door, is a sideboard, and on either side of it, also against the wall, are stiff-backed chairs. To the right of the door is a small china-cabinet. Against the right wall, up-stage of the window, is an open bookcase. Below the window are a bureau and chair. Vases, ornaments, and framed photographs litter the mantel-shelf and the top of the china-cabinet. The sideboard is laden with silver-plated objects and glassware, and on top of the bureau are two silver candlesticks and a small silver ash-tray. There are far too many pictures on the walls; even so, room has been found for a couple of china plaques and two or three

fretwork wall-brackets. No fire is burning in the fireplace, and the empty grate is concealed by a huge paper fan. Other chairs and pieces of furniture should be set about the room at the discretion of the producer, who should strive to create the impression of a room both over-furnished and fussy. In achieving this, he must exercise considerable care and cunning to ensure that the movements of the actors are in no way hampered.

When the curtain rises it is the early afternoon of a hot and sultry day in August. The door leading into the hall is open; so, too, is the french window. The sole occupant of the room is Mrs Braby, who is on her knees in front of the fireplace, polishing the brass kerb. A thin, worn-looking little woman, with pinched features, she is wearing the shapeless, rusty-looking clothes of the typical charwoman. Her age is not easy to determine: she looks about fifty, but is probably younger. Beside her, on the floor, is a small, dilapidated-looking basket in which are dusters, polishing-rags, and a tin of metal-polish. After a moment she relaxes from her efforts, straightens her back, and, with a tired gesture, brushes back a strand of hair. As she does so Mabel, a young and quite pretty parlourmaid, comes in from the hall, carrying a crumb-tray and brush. Going to the sideboard, she drags open a drawer, pitches the brush and tray into it, then slams it to with unnecessary violence and noise.

MRS BRABY [*watching her*]. 'Ave they come out of the dining-room yet, Mabel?

MABEL. No, they haven't. They're sitting round the table, as per usual, looking as though their rich uncle's will's just been read, and everything gone to 'a cats' home.

MRS BRABY. I wish they'd look sharp: I want to do the grate in there.

MABEL. Never get up from the table, Mrs Braby, the minute you've finished eating; it jolts and jars the digestive process. Amen.

MRS BRABY. Eh?

[*She rises.*]

MABEL. Just another of Sanctimonious Samuel's fancy little fads. He's as many as a dog has fleas!

MRS BRABY [*shocked*]. Oh, Mabel, you didn't ought to speak like that of Mr Twemlow. It isn't respectful.

MABEL [*to by left arm of the settee*]. It isn't meant to be! And, what's more, anyone expecting me to show respect for that prize goody-goody is in for a big disappointment.

MRS BRABY. 'E's very much looked up to in the town, anyway.

MABEL [*scornfully*]. So is the town-hall clock! [*To in front of the settee*] If you'd seen him just now, Mrs Braby, if you'd *seen* him, taking little sips at a glass of warm tepid water, like a hen at a puddle, and crumbling a wholemeal biscuit! My God, but I don't know how I kept my hands off him!

MRS BRABY. Is that all the lunch 'e's 'ad?

MABEL. He's going to the dentist, to have a tooth yanked out, and mustn't take gas on a full stomach. [*Snatching up a cushion from the settee—giving it a vicious shake*] Why waste good gas on him, anyway? Why not a smart rap over the head with a length of lead-piping? [*Turning towards Mrs Braby—still holding the cushion*] What d'you think happened just now, Mrs B.? [*Mrs Braby shakes her head.*] I asked if I could slip to the end of the road, and watch the carnival procession go by. She'd have said yes, but, before she could part her lips, Mr Killjoy has to say *his* little piece. [*Giving a burlesque version*] "I most strongly disapprove of this carnival nonsense. To my mind, it's nothing but an excuse for vulgar horseplay and rowdyism, and I consider that those taking part in it might be employing their time to

better advantage. No member of my household will participate in any capacity whatsoever."

MRS BRABY [*awed*]. Lor', Mabel, did 'e say all that?

MABEL. For two pins I'd have given him a piece of my mind, but Miss Hattie happened to chip in. Didn't want to eat her stewed prunes because they reminded her of drowned mice. "Let us have no silliness," he says. "Eat up those lovely prunes this minute, and place the stones neatly on the side of your plate, like you've been taught."

MRS BRABY. 'E certainly likes to 'ave everything done just 'is way, don't 'e?

MABEL. Finnick old fuss-pot! [*Tossing the cushion on to the settee—pointing to the framed photograph on the table*] There he is, on his wedding day! Look at him, will you, squinting out over that great high collar, like a donkey over a white-washed wall! [*Going towards the french window*] God, but I wouldn't be married to that walking tombstone—no, not for all the tea in China!

MRS BRABY. And yet, Mabel, 'e's what folk'd call a real model 'usband and father.

MABEL. Give me a man with a bit of the devil in him, I say!

MRS BRABY. You'd better go in for one like mine, then: 'e's all devil.

MABEL [*somewhat casually, as though Time has rendered the topic boring*]. Oh, him . . . How's he keeping?

MRS BRABY. Very well indeed, thank you. 'E'd a narrow escape from being sober the other day, but managed to pawn our Marge's new raincoat just in time.

MABEL. Oh, well, he'll drink himself to death one of these days, and that'll be that.

MRS BRABY. Drink *me* to death, more like! It's a miracle I've gone on as long as I 'ave, working and slaving to keep a poor bit of a 'ome together! Never done a stroke, not for twenty year, 'e 'asn't, and drunk every penny 'e could get 'is

thieving 'ands on! . . . You know the name they 'ave for 'im in the town?

MABEL. Everybody knows it—Scum Braby!

MRS BRABY. Scum Braby! And they couldn't 'ave it on a better!

MABEL. Perhaps he'll turn over a new leaf one day.

MRS BRABY. That's right. P'r'aps 'e will. And p'r'aps they'll make me queen of England! [*A low, distant rumble of thunder is heard.*] What's that?

MABEL. Thunder. It wouldn't surprise me if we had a real bad storm. It feels like it.

MRS BRABY. I shouldn't wonder.

MABEL [*moving a little away from the window*]. It'll just about come in time to put the lid on the carnival procession. I can't say I'd find any pleasure in splashing through the streets, dolled up in fancy dress, drenched through, and expecting to be struck by lightning any minute. [*Another distant roll of thunder.*] There! Hark at it!

MRS BRABY [*paying no attention to the thunder*]. Pleasure, did you say? [*Moving a little away from the fireplace*] D'you know what *my* idea of *real* pleasure'd be, Mabel? . . . To lie in bed till 'alf-past eight, and then to come downstairs and find breakfast all got ready for me. . . . It'll never 'appen, I know; but I like to think of it sometimes, and—and sort of kid myself.

[*She returns to by the fireplace, flops down on to her knees again, and picks up the polishing-cloth. As she does so Mrs Twemlow (Alice), coming from off left, appears in the hall. She is in her middle forties, of slight build, and is very plainly dressed. Her lips have never known the touch of a lipstick, and she has never had a hair-do in her life. In her younger days she was labelled "Just a home girl"; nowadays she is "A perfect wife and mother."*]

ALICE [*in the hall*]. Mabel! [*Coming into the doorway*] Oh, there you are, Mabel. I've been looking for you.

MABEL. I just popped in to see if I could give Mrs Braby a hand, madam.

ALICE. Yes—well—I want you to find Mr Twemlow's goloshes, please. They're in the box-room.

MABEL. Goloshes, madam? Now?

ALICE. Mr Twemlow will take them with him to the dentist's, just in case. There's a storm threatening. Make a *very* neat brown-paper parcel of them, please. Mr Twemlow dislikes carrying untidy parcels.

MABEL. But I thought he was going in the doctor's car, madam.

ALICE. So he is, but the car might break down, and Mr Twemlow likes to be prepared for any eventuality.

MR TWEMLOW'S VOICE [*off-stage—calling*]. Alice! Alice!

ALICE [*calling back*]. Yes, dear, here I am! I'm coming! [*As she hurries off*] Can't you find your woollen scarf? It's in the top drawer. . . . [*The rest of her speech is lost.*]

MABEL [*going to the doorway—pausing there*]. I wonder if he's prepared for a slosh in the face with a wet dish-cloth, because that's what he's going to get one day—from me—with my love!

[*She goes off. During the short scene between Mabel and her mistress Mrs Braby has been occupied in a vigorous polishing of the metal kerb. Now that she is alone, her polishing slows down and finally ceases, and she replaces the cloth in the basket. As she does so her husband, whom we have heard of as Scum Braby, appears in the opening of the french window. He is probably about the same age as herself—a shifty-eyed, unprepossessing-looking figure of a man, with 'waster' written all over him. Ordinarily his appearance would not be particularly*]

remarkable, but it is rendered so to-day by the fact that he is wearing the tunic, bare legs, sandals, and vine wreath popularly attributed to the god Bacchus. The tunic is a soiled and crumpled affair, one or two of the sandal-straps are broken, and the property vine wreath, which is set on his head at a rakish angle, is decidedly 'bitty.' The whole rig-out, in fact, looks as though it has been lying for years on the dusty top shelf of some back-street theatrical costumier's. He is rather more than slightly drunk. For a moment he stands there in the opening, staring blearily across the room at his wife. Then the latter, picking up the basket, rises wearily and starts for the doorway.

BRABY [*hissing between his teeth*]. Sssst!

[At the sound she stops, looks towards the french window, and sees him.]

MRS BRABY [*with a frightened gasp*]. Joe! Joe, what in God's name are you doing 'ere? What is it? What d'you want?

BRABY. *That's* a nice sort o' welcome, as from wife to 'usband, I must say! No open arms, no loving kiss, just a sound like a 'orse sneezing—"Whatisitwhatcherwant?"

MRS BRABY [*going quickly to the door—closing it—starting to go to him*]. See 'ere, now, you get out of 'ere, fast as you can, before anyone comes! [*Halting behind the settee—taking in his whole appearance*] And what 'ave you done with your trousers? Oh, my God, what a sight you do look!

[She puts her basket down on the table.]

BRABY. Woman, you don't und'stand. This—this attire that I am wearing is—is fansdress—fansdress for carnival!

MRS BRABY. Fancy dress? Ho! And what are you supposed to be, I'd like to know?

BRABY [*wrinkling his brow for a moment—then recollecting*].
Backers.

MRS BRABY. Backers, eh? After the bookies 'ave took everything from you but the top 'alf of your nightshirt, I suppose!

BRABY. You're a very ig'rant woman. . . . Backers! Backers, god of wine!

MRS BRABY. I might 'ave known there'd be drink in it! I suppose it's that rubbishy lot down at the Rose and Crown 'ave dragged you into this! Making a laughing-stock of you! And you with no more sense than to let 'em! I'd be ashamed!

BRABY. They're jolly good sports, all of 'em, and all done in the carnival spirit—and let me tell you, I like this costume! I shall prob'ly never wear trousers again! Never!
[*He comes a little farther into the room.*]

MRS BRABY [*hurrying to him*]. 'Ere, where are you going? [*Grasping his arm, and trying to push him towards the french window*] You get out of 'ere this minute, d'you 'ear?

BRABY [*dragging his arm free—thrusting her from him*]. 'Ere, 'ere! That'll do! Stop pawing me! 'Ands off!

MRS BRABY [*a quick look towards the door—dropping her voice to a loud whisper*]. Will you get out of this room, you great drunken fool, before some one comes in and catches you!

BRABY. Let 'em! If a man wishes to see 'is wife urgent on a little matter, 'e's breaking no law, is 'e?

[*Starting to move down-stage right.*]

MRS BRABY [*following him*]. You should 'ave gone round to the back door! And what's it you want? If it's money you're after, you're unlucky!

BRABY. Oh, I am, am I? And 'ow d'you suppose I can go to carnival without a penny-piece, woman, eh?

MRS BRABY. That's your look-out. You're getting nothing out of me, so there!

BRABY [*moving towards centre*]. Oh, dear! Always the same! Always this argle-bargle over money! It makes me tired.

MRS BRABY [*nearer to him*]. Tired, eh? You try working and earning a bit, like me, and see 'ow tired *that* makes you!

BRABY. Oh, for God's sake, go and get your purse and stop cackling!

[*They are now facing each other, down-stage centre.*]

MRS BRABY. I've told you once, I've nothing for you.

BRABY. And that, Martha Braby, is a damned lie! Mrs Barratt paid you seven-and-six last night, and it's in your purse this minute! Seven bob'll do me. You can keep the sixpence for your trouble.

[*He turns from her and goes to in front of the settee.*]

There is a short silence, during which she looks at him helplessly. Then:

MRS BRABY [*desperately*]. Listen: if I—if I give you a shilling, will you—will you go away? Will you do that?

BRABY. A bob? Now, I ask you, what would I do with a bob?

MRS BRABY. What you always do, I suppose—drink it!

[*He does not reply. As though only now becoming completely aware of his surroundings, he is looking slowly round the room. The impression he receives appears to sober him somewhat.*]

BRABY [*after a moment—still looking round*]. Very nice. . . . Very posh. . . . Oo'd 'ave dreamed, now, that Mr 'oly Samuel dwelt in such marble 'alls?

MRS BRABY [*staring at him—reading his thoughts—in little more than a whisper*]. Joel

• [*She takes a quick step or two towards him, then pauses. There is a long, distant roll of thunder.*]

BRABY [*still studying the room*]. Everything just so . . . like a lady's buddywar . . . and stinking of money fit to

knock you down. [*Looking at her now*] I'm not so sure you'll need your purse, after all. There's pickings 'ere, and to spare.

MRS BRABY [*staring at him in silence—then suddenly rushing to him*]. Joe Braby! You dare touch one single thing in this room! D'you 'ear what I say? You dare!

BRABY [*ignoring her—looking towards down-stage right*]. Them candlesticks, now. . . . It's queer, the sudden fancy I've took to them candlesticks. . . . There's something about 'em—I dunno what—that kinda draws me.

[*He makes a movement, as though to go to them.*

MRS BRABY [*clutching him*]. No! No, you're not to! Joe—

BRABY [*turning on her—roughly*]. On your way, you old toffee-apple, you!

[*He gives her a push that flings her back on to the settee, strides purposefully to the bureau, and snatches up one of the candlesticks. As he does so she struggles to her feet.*

[*Looking at it*] Silver, too. No bloody electro in this bird's nest!

[*She hesitates for one panic-stricken second, then half runs up to the door.*

MRS BRABY. Joe!—Joe!— You put that down, this minute!—I'll fetch Mr Twemlow!—I will! [*He is balancing the candlestick in his hand, testing its weight, as though to tantalize her.*] All right, then—you've asked for it—I'm fetching Mr Twemlow now! [*She grasps the door-handle.*

BRABY [*something in her tone warning him that this is no idle threat*]. Eh?

[*He makes a feint of returning it, then of deciding not to. Finally he replaces the candlestick on the bureau. As he does so a more distant rumble of thunder is heard.*

MRS BRABY [*still by the door—yielding to circumstance*]. Listen to me: you shall 'ave the money—and go! It's in my purse—and don't you dare touch one single thing while I'm out of this room! You 'ear what I say?

BRABY. It'll be seven-and-six now. My price 'as gone up.

MRS BRABY. Just you keep your 'ands to yourself while I'm out! I shall know! You lay your finger on a thing, and I shall know!

BRABY. You know everything, don't you?

[*She opens the door quietly and goes swiftly out, leaving the door wide open. He stands quite still for a second or two, as though to make sure that she has really gone; then he turns again to the bureau, picks up the candlestick, looks at it thoughtfully, then regretfully replaces it. His hand hovers for a moment over the bureau, then he picks up the little silver ash-tray. As he does so Hattie Twemlow appears in the hall. She is a not particularly attractive-looking girl of about fourteen, wearing a navy-blue school-frock, black stockings, and canvas shoes, and her unbobbed hair is held by a comb at the back. Seeing Braby, she pauses, and comes into the doorway. At this point Braby picks up the ash-tray. He makes as though to slip the thing into his trouser-pocket, realizes the situation, stares owl-ishly down at his costume, then at the ash-tray, wrinkles his brow, shakes his head, and murmurs "Blast!" Difficulties, however, are meant to be overcome. He will slip it down the front of his tunic. He has just raised his hand to do so, when:*

HATTIE. Hullo!

[*He swings violently round. There is dead silence for a moment, during which he, wide-eyed and with*

dropped jaw, stares at her, while she regards him with complete calmness. Then:

Good afternoon, Mr Braby. I frightened you then, didn't I?
[*She comes farther into the room.*]

BRABY [*stammering*]. Y-yes, missie, you did, you—

HATTIE. If you'd had a weak heart, you might have dropped down dead. I've never seen anyone drop down dead, have you? [*He can only shake his head.*] I once saw a man in a fit, though, and another time I nearly saw a workman fall from the top of the gasworks. I was just one minute too late. [*Nearer to him*] Why are you wearing those funny clothes, Mr Braby?

BRABY [*holding the hand with the ash-tray behind his back*]. Er—fansdress, missie. Carnival.

HATTIE. You look very silly in them, anyway. Father won't let me go to the carnival. He says it's only for the riff-raff.

BRABY. Oh?

HATTIE. Yes. And he says you're the biggest drunkard and scoundrel for fifty miles round. Are you?

BRABY [*with an attempt at indignation*]. Me, missie? Well, now, I ask you, do I look it?

HATTIE [*studying him*]. Yes, I think you do, rather. And why don't you put that ash-tray where it belongs, instead of hiding it behind your back?

BRABY. What? Ash-tray? [*Bringing it from behind his back*] Oh—oh, this? Why, there now, isn't that funny? I'd just picked it up to look at, when you come in.

HATTIE. I expect you were trying to steal it, really. Shall I—? [*She takes it from him and replaces it on the bureau.*] You needn't be afraid I'll give you away, though. I'm thinking of being a gangster's moll one day.

BRABY. A—a what, missie?

HATTIE. Gangster's moll. I've got a secret book all

about one. I've got quite a lot of secret books, under a loose board in my bedroom floor. We have a club at school—The Secret Book Club. Seven of us. I'm president. And you needn't keep looking at the door, Mr Braby. Your wife won't be here for a long time. Mabel's just fallen off the steps and broken her legs.

BRABY. Broke 'er legs, missie? Mabel?

HATTIE. Both of them. That's why I'm here: to answer the door when the doctor comes. . . . So while we're waiting let's pretend I'm a gangster's moll, shall we? It'll be a little practice for me, won't it?

BRABY [*dazedly*]. Yes, missie.

HATTIE. All you do is fall down when I shoot you. [*Pretending to point a revolver at him*] Bang! [*He does not move.*] But you haven't fallen down!

BRABY. I—oh, I couldn't do that, missie. I—it's my rheumatics—you've no idea——

HATTIE. Never mind. It doesn't matter. We'll pretend I'm a lady detective, instead; and I've just caught you stealing a silver ash-tray, and of course I go and call my father.

[*She starts for the doorway.*]

BRABY [*panicking*]. No—no, don't you do that, missie! Wait a minute! [*She pauses.*] I—I think p'r'aps I could *try* to fall down.

HATTIE. All right. Just do the best you can. [*Points the pretence revolver at him again.*] Bang!

BRABY. Er——

HATTIE. Well, what are you standing there for? You're dead, aren't you?

BRABY. Oh——

* [*Very awkwardly, and with faint groanings, Braby gets down on his knees.*]

HATTIE. Go on! Go on! Right on the floor!

BRABY. It's agony, missie! It's agony!

HATTIE. Oh, go on!

BRABY [*groaning*]. Oh, my God!

[*With great difficulty, he manages to stretch out on the floor, his head towards down-stage. At this moment Mr Samuel Twemlow enters. He is in the early fifties: a severe-featured, joyless-looking man, wearing dark clothes, a high, stiff collar, and pince-nez. His speech is extremely precise, and he appears to obtain his mental outlook on life through lemon-coloured spectacles.*

SAMUEL. Hattie, your mother wants you to—— [*Seeing Braby—halting abruptly—aghast*] Hattie!—*what?—who?* What is the meaning of this—this——

HATTIE. I came in just now and found him, Father. I think it's Mrs Braby's husband. He must be very drunk, mustn't he, Father?

SAMUEL [*approaching nearer*]. Braby!—and in that ridiculous costume!—of all the disgraceful exhibitions! Get up at once! At once! [*As Braby struggles into a sitting position*] Go to your mother, Hattie, this instant!

HATTIE. Can't I——?

SAMUEL. This instant, if you please!

[*She goes out with obvious reluctance, pausing for a second in the doorway, and clapping her hand over her mouth to stifle a laugh. Meanwhile Braby is scrambling awkwardly to his feet.*

BRABY. I'm ever so sorry, sir. It—it was your little girl, sir——

SAMUEL [*checking him*]. You'll kindly not refer to my daughter! You should be ashamed of yourself! Such disgusting behaviour, in front of an innocent child! And what are you doing in my house, anyway?

BRABY. I—I just popped in to see my wife, sir.

SAMUEL. And your wife had the—the audacity to show

you in here, the drawing-room? I never heard of such a thing! Never!

BRABY. No, sir, I——

SAMUEL [*loudly—somewhat shrilly*]. Don't you dare to argue with me! Get out of my house this minute, before I call a policeman!

BRABY [*edging crab-wise towards the french window*]. Yes, sir—I'm just going, sir—and—and I'd like to say, I'm very sorry about Mabel, sir.

SAMUEL. Mabel? Mabel? And what, pray, has my parlourmaid to do with you?

BRABY. I—I was thinking about her legs, sir.

SAMUEL. Her legs? Merciful heaven! Are there no limits to your lewd-mindedness? Be off with you! You're a disgrace to the town, and if I'd my way you'd be locked up! They do well indeed to call you Scum Braby!

BRABY [*nearing the french window*]. Yes, sir—that's right, sir—but least said, soonest mended, and—and—— [*Achieving the safety of the french window*] And they've a name for you, too, you old puff-adder! [*Raising his voice to a shout*] Sammy Sour-puss!

[*And, in a flash, he is gone! Samuel's feelings vent themselves in one big explosive "Oh!" Bristling with indignation, he strides to the window and shakes his fist.*]

BRABY'S VOICE [*chanting mockingly from some distance away*]. Sour-puss! Sour-puss! Old Sammy Sour-puss!

SAMUEL [*his voice trembling with fury*]. Scandalous! An outrage!

- [*He turns from the window, and is stamping across to by the fireplace, when Alice comes hurrying in.*]

ALICE. Oh—oh, Samuel, has that dreadful man gone? [*Not waiting for him to reply*] That poor wife of his—he's been

here, trying to squeeze money out of her! I told her not to give him a penny! I said I'd speak to him myself!

SAMUEL [*pulling himself together*]. I have already dealt with him, my dear—and in a manner he is *not* likely to forget! He crept out of here, not a moment ago, like a whipped dog!

ALICE. I hope you made him feel thoroughly ashamed of himself, Samuel.

SAMUEL. By the time I'd finished with him he was literally dumb with shame!

BRABY'S VOICE [*from much farther away*]. Yahooooo! Old Sammy Sour-puss! Yahooooo!

ALICE [*glancing quickly towards the window*]. Good heavens! Who on earth's that shouting out there?

SAMUEL [*by the fireplace—with an elaborate shrug*]. Those wretched carnival people starting their nonsense, I suppose. Sheer licensed hooliganism! I've no patience with it!

ALICE [*by the right arm of the settee—soothingly*]. Don't think about it, dear. I'm sure you ought to keep as calm as possible, just before visiting the dentist.

SAMUEL. Thank you for your advice, Alice, which is quite unnecessary. I am perfectly calm.

[*He sits in the easy-chair.*]

ALICE. Yes, dear, of course you are.

[*Hattie wanders into the room.*]

SAMUEL [*looking at his watch*]. Dr Redfern ought to be here any minute now. The appointment was for two.

ALICE [*to in front of the settee*]. I'm so glad that Dr Redfern's going with you, dear. It makes it all so much—*er—safer.*

SAMUEL. Safer? I see no particular peril in having a tooth extracted. I like to have my medical adviser with me on such occasions, that is all.

ALICE. I'm sure you're right, dear.

HATTIE [*who has strolled to just below the window*]. Mother,

if I mayn't go to the carnival, could I go with Father to the dentist's instead?

ALICE. Why, Hattie, I—— [*Glances at Samuel for his approval or otherwise, but gets no help.*] Well, perhaps you could ride there and back with Father and Dr Redfern, and sit in the waiting-room while it's—er—happening.

HATTIE [*unenthusiastically*]. Oh. [*A pause.*] I couldn't really—*see* it happening, I suppose?

SAMUEL. Eh?

ALICE [*shocked*]. Good gracious, child, what an idea! Certainly not! [*She sits on the settee.*]

HATTIE. Oh. [*Another brief pause.*] I think perhaps I'll stay at home, then, and read *Eric*, or *Little by Little*.

SAMUEL. You've been reading that book for the last six months, Hattie, I'm sure.

HATTIE. Yes, Father, I know. I like it so much, I'm reading it slowly, to make it last.

ALICE [*taking knitting from the work-basket*]. We're very glad that *our* little girl has such good taste in reading, aren't we, Father? Mildred Hopkinson's mother was telling me yesterday that she found some *dreadful* books hidden under the child's bedroom floor. Quite *dreadful*!

SAMUEL. Which is precisely what I'd expect of any child of that Hopkinson man. A reprobate if ever there was one.

ALICE [*after a sigh—shaking her head*]. I'm afraid that's only too true. [*She starts to knit.*]

HATTIE [*with faint apprehension*]. What was Mildred's mother doing, poking about under the bedroom floor?

ALICE. I've no idea. Perhaps she had reason to suspect. It's nice to know that we can trust *our* little girl.

HATTIE [*relieved*]. Yes, Mother.

[*Mabel, carrying a small brown-paper parcel, appears in the hall. During the following Hattie wanders out into the garden.*]

MABEL [*in the doorway*]. Excuse me, madam. I've parcelled the goloshes. Shall I put them on the hall table?

ALICE. Thank you, Mabel.

SAMUEL. Oh—and, Mabel, will you ask Cook to have a little thin gruel ready for me on my return?

ALICE. I was wondering, dear, if perhaps a little brandy . . .

SAMUEL [*firmly*]. Certainly not.

ALICE. Thin gruel, then, Mabel.

SAMUEL. Very thin.

MABEL. Yes, sir.

[*Mabel goes off right, reappearing almost immediately, minus the parcel, and going off left. There is a brief pause.*]

SAMUEL [*with a little nod towards her knitting*]. I see that you're already busy preparing your birthday offering, dear.

ALICE. Yes. [*A tiny pause*] I often smile, Samuel, when I think how surprised I was, the first year we were married, when I asked you what you would like for your birthday, and you said bedsocks.

SAMUEL. Quite . . . I should like to think, Alice, that in that precise moment you began just faintly to realize that you'd married a man a little out of the common rut.

ALICE. Oh, I'm sure I did, dear. [*A very brief pause.*]

SAMUEL. My birthday gift to you this year will, of course, take its accustomed form—a further hundred shares in Town and Country Crematoriums, Limited, a safe and sound investment that will never go up in smoke.

ALICE. No, dear . . . I *had* been wondering if perhaps *this* year . . . [*She hesitates.*]

SAMUEL. Yes?

ALICE. No—no, Samuel, you'd think it so silly of me.

SAMUEL. Possibly. I also happen to think people silly who begin sentences and then leave off in mid-air.

ALICE [*taking the plunge*]. Well—well, I happened to see a little brooch in Murphy's window. Such a dear little brooch, Samuel, and quite plain: just a thin gold bar and a tiny half-moon of seed pearls.

SAMUEL. But—what earthly use could you ever have for such a thing? You have your mother's garnets.

ALICE [*falteringly*]. I thought perhaps I could wear it, dear, if we ever went to—to a theatre.

SAMUEL [*rising*]. My dear Alice, the theatre drew its last breath when Irving died. [*Glancing at his watch*] I shall now get my hat and scarf, so as to be quite ready when Dr Redfern calls.

[*He goes out into the hall, and off left. For a few seconds she continues to knit; then her needles slow down, and finally cease to move. She lowers the knitting to her lap, and is gazing directly in front of her, a far-away look on her face, when Hattie, returning from the garden, wanders back into the room. Alice, jerked out of her thoughts, glances at Hattie, then resumes her knitting. There is a further short pause, while Hattie moves aimlessly about the room, eventually coming to rest on the arm of the easy-chair, where she perches, idly swinging one leg.*]

ALICE [*looking up from her knitting*]. Hattie dear, I wish you'd either sit down properly or else stand up. You know how your father disapproves of lolling and lounging.

HATTIE [*not moving*]. Hasn't he gone yet?

ALICE. No.

HATTIE. Oh! [*She rises—then, after a moment's silence*] Mother . . . what sort of gas is it that the dentist will give to Father?

ALICE. It's a—a special sort, to—to just put him to sleep, so that he won't feel any pain.

HATTIE. D'you mean like when Auntie Sophie had little Toto put to sleep?

ALICE [*sharply*]. You know perfectly well that I mean nothing of the kind! Really, Hattie, I think you'd better go to your room and read.

HATTIE. Yes, Mother.

[*She goes towards the doorway as her father re-enters, carrying his hat and a woollen scarf.*

SAMUEL [*as he enters*]. I believe I asked you, Alice, to kindly air my scarf for me in front of the kitchen fire.

ALICE [*dropping her knitting on to the settee—rising*]. Oh! Oh, my dear, I completely forgot!

SAMUEL [*testily—placing his hat on the table*]. Naturally, with your head full of brooches and such-like fripperies!

ALICE. I am so sorry, dear. Do let me run along with it now—*please!*

SAMUEL [*winding the scarf round his throat*]. There isn't time. I must risk laryngitis, that's all. [*To Hattie, who is lingering in the doorway*] Are you going out or coming in, Hattie? Make up your mind, please. I dislike indecision.

HATTIE [*with rather more feeling than the occasion would appear to warrant*]. Good-bye, Father.

SAMUEL [*looking at her sharply*]. Eh? . . . Oh, good-bye.

[*She looks at him a second or two longer, then she goes. From far away in the distance a brass band is heard playing a march.*

SAMUEL [*looking towards the empty doorway—then, to Alice*]. Really, from the way the child said "Good-bye," you'd think I was never coming back.

ALICE. She's unhappy because you're going to the dentist. She's a sensitive little thing. [*Looking towards the french window*] Hark! Music!

SAMUEL [*striding to the window*]. That clownish carnival

tomfoolery! The whole town turned into a bear garden! Really, is there no sanity left in the world?

[He closes the french window with a slam, deadening the sound of the music. As he does so Mabel crosses the hall from left to right.]

[His attention caught by something in the garden] Just look at that, now! Two quite perfect roses, snapped off, and lying on the ground! That brute Braby must have crashed into them in his headlong flight!

ALICE. Oh, what a shame!

SAMUEL *[turning from the window]*. Why *must* there be such people? Why *should* it take all sorts to make a world? Why can't everything and everybody be neat and orderly, like—well, like——?

ALICE. Like you, dear. I know.

SAMUEL. I have no desire to exhibit myself as a model, Alice, but at the same time—— *[Breaks off—to Mabel, who has reappeared in the doorway]* Yes, Mabel?

MABEL. If you please, sir, the doctor's outside in his car.

SAMUEL. Thank you.

[Mabel goes off left. Samuel picks up his hat from the table.]

You may expect me back, my dear, in about half an hour.

ALICE. Yes, dear. And—and I *do* hope you'll be all right at the dentist's.

SAMUEL. And why should I not be all right? I haven't poisoned *my* system with alcohol or blackened *my* lungs with filthy tobacco-fumes. I shall see you presently, Alice.

[He goes out, closing the door. The music of the band sounds nearer now, though still muffled by the closed window. Alice remains quite still for a moment, then goes to the settee as though about to sit and resume her knitting, but changes her mind, and, instead, starts to wander aimlessly about the room]

with a vaguely restless air. She is by the fireplace, altering ever so slightly the position of a vase on the mantelshelf, when there is a gentle tap at the door.

ALICE. Come in.

[The door is opened just enough to reveal Mrs Braby.]

MRS BRABY. Excuse me, ma'am, but I left my little basket 'ere. Could I . . . ?

ALICE. Yes, of course, Mrs Braby.

MRS BRABY. Thank you, ma'am.

[Walking very quietly, as though in a sickroom, Mrs Braby goes to the table and takes up the basket.]

ALICE. Are you feeling better now, Mrs Braby?

MRS BRABY. Yes, thank you, ma'am. Cook gave me a nice 'ot cup o' tea. *[Lingering by the table]* It was 'im turning up like 'e did that gave me palpitations. You see, ma'am, if 'e's going to start 'is 'anky-panky at 'ouses where I oblige, I'll soon be out of a job. Folk'd never stand for it.

ALICE *[somewhat diffidently]*. Has he . . . always been like this, Mrs Braby?

MRS BRABY *[a shrug]*. 'E weren't so bad the first year or so, though 'e were always one of the larky kind. . . . And I reckon they're the ones most liable to break a woman's 'cart and back, the larky kind. If I'd my time over again I'd go in for one of the quiet sort: some one more like—well, if I may make so bold, ma'am, some one more like Mr Twemlow.

ALICE *[with just a trace of a smile]*. I don't think anyone could describe Mr Twemlow as 'larky.'

MRS BRABY. Mind you, they're often not much to look at, but they are dependable.

ALICE. . . . Yes.

MRS BRABY *[after hesitating]*. Oh, well . . . *[Starting for the doorway—pausing midway]* You know, ma'am, of all the ladies I oblige, you're the one I envies most.

ALICE [*with an embarrassed little laugh*]. Oh—oh, really?

MRS BRABY. Mrs Barratt's 'usband, now, 'e's all right, but she 'as to ask 'im for every penny; Mrs Bickerstaff's is always 'arping about 'is first wife, who spent all 'er time in this world just practising to be an angel in the next; and Mrs Eaton can only 'ave servants that are well over fifty and ugly as sin.

ALICE. Oh, dear.

MRS BRABY. What I say about Mr Twemlow is, there's no nonsense about 'im. Ho, no! [*She goes to the doorway.*] You've only got to look at 'im to see as you didn't let *your* 'eart rule *your* 'ead, and time 'as shown you was right. . . . And now I'll get on with my brasses.

[*She goes out, closing the door quietly behind her. Alice stands quite still, looking at the closed door. Then, as though to dispel her thoughts, she gives herself a little shake, goes briskly to the settee, sits, and picks up her knitting. Holding it at almost eye-level, she studies it for a moment, then lowers it, as though about to commence operations on it. Instead, she suddenly pitches it to the other end of the settee, springs to her feet, goes to the window, and flings it open. She is standing there, the music of the brass band pouring into the room as:*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

When the curtain rises, nearly two hours have elapsed. The french window is still open, and the door up-stage closed. Alice is seated stiffly upright on the precise middle of the settee, the knitting is lying where she tossed it, and she is trying to read a book. The attempt is not very successful, for

she is finding it difficult to concentrate. After a moment she shuts the book with a snap, rises, goes to the easy-chair, sits, and reopens the book. She makes another determined effort to read, but is almost immediately distracted by a slight sound from the direction of the hall.

ALICE [*calling anxiously*]. Samuel! Samuel, is that you?

[She rises as she speaks. The door opens just enough to admit Hattie.]

[*In a nervy voice*] Oh—it's you, Hattie, is it?

HATTIE [*closing the door—remaining by it*]. Yes, Mother . . . Isn't Father back yet?

ALICE. No—no, he is not—and I'm very, very worried indeed. I simply can't *think* what's happened to him.

[She tosses the book on to the easy-chair, and moves to down-stage left.]

HATTIE [*coming down to behind the settee*]. Was it the dentist you were telephoning to just now?

ALICE. Yes, it was. . . . Father ought to have been home at least an hour ago. As he didn't appear, I got it into my head that something—something dreadful had happened, and I rang up the dentist.

HATTIE [*by the right end of the settee*]. And what did he say?

ALICE. The tooth had been extracted without the least trouble, and Father left quite a while ago. He'd decided to walk home, instead of riding in Dr Redfern's car. [*Returning to the easy-chair—sitting*] I don't understand it at all: Father never changes his mind, and if he says he's going to ride, then he rides. . . . And even if he is walking home, why isn't he here? The dentist's is barely ten minutes away.

HATTIE [*perching on the right arm of the settee*]. You don't think the dentist is, perhaps—breaking it to you gently, do you?

ALICE. What?

HATTIE. You don't think he may ring up and say that Father didn't really leave, and he isn't very well? And then, after a while, telephone again, and say he's dead?

ALICE [*rising—agitatedly*]. Hattie! Hattie, how *can* you suggest anything so terrible?

HATTIE. It was just a thought, Mother.

ALICE. It was a very, very wicked thought, and you should be ashamed! [*Fancying she hears a sound*] There, now! Wasn't that the front door?

[*Hattie slips off the settee, hurries to the door, opens it, and peers out.*]

HATTIE [*withdrawing her head—closing the door*]. There's no one there. Perhaps it was something falling somewhere.

[*Alice crosses to by the window. Hattie goes to by the fireplace.*]

When Elsie Potter's uncle died the clock in the dining-room struck one and toppled right off the mantelpiece. Wasn't that strange?

ALICE [*not listening*]. If he isn't back in five minutes, I shall telephone the police or—or the hospital.

HATTIE. I should try the hospital first. Thousands of people were killed on the roads last year. It said so in the newspaper.

ALICE [*turning from the window*]. You'd no right to be reading the newspaper. You know quite well that Father doesn't allow you to.

HATTIE. This was on the bit you used for lining my handkerchief-drawer.

ALICE [*moving towards down-stage right*]. And Father's the least likely person in the world to be knocked down. He never steps off the pavement until he's absolutely sure it's safe.

HATTIE. In lots and lots of cases death was caused

through vehicles mounting the pavement. [*A loud door-slam is heard.*] What's that?

ALICE. It certainly isn't Father. He *never* slams a door.

[*Hattie starts to go to the door. Before she reaches it, it opens to reveal Samuel. But not quite the same Samuel, for it is immediately evident that some change has been wrought in him. He has not only omitted to remove his hat, but is wearing it at a rakish and unconventional angle; his scarf he appears to have dispensed with; and upon his shoulders are a few little multi-coloured bits of confetti. There is silence for a split second. Then:*

[*Starting to go to him*] Samuel!—oh, Samuel, thank God you're back! I've been so worried! I couldn't think *what* had happened to you!

SAMUEL [*coolly*]. Oh?

ALICE [*halting*]. I expected you back in the doctor's car, at least an hour ago.

SAMUEL [*carelessly*]. I changed my mind, and walked. [*Then, with sudden truculence*] You any objections?

ALICE [*startled by his tone*]. No—no, of course not, dear. But you must have walked very slowly. Didn't you feel well?

SAMUEL [*coming farther into the room*]. I felt fine. There just didn't seem anything special to hurry home for—[*looking at her very significantly*] if you follow my meaning—so I took a stroll round the town.

ALICE [*blankly*]. Oh . . . I do hope you managed to avoid the carnival procession.

SAMUEL. I saw it twice: first in the High Street, then I nipped up Brook Street and saw it all over again. Damn' good show!

ALICE [*stepping back*]. *What?*

HATTIE [*gleefully*]. He said it was damn' good—didn't you, Father?

ALICE [*very shocked*]. Hattie! Really, Samuel, that *word*!

SAMUEL [*going to by the fireplace—passing in front of Hattie*]. Oh, shut up!

ALICE. Samuel!

HATTIE [*as he passes her*]. Oh, look, Mother! Father's all sprinkled with confetti! Doesn't he look funny!

SAMUEL [*squinting down at his shoulders*]. That? It was chucked at me by a saucy young madam dressed in nothing but paper roses! I gave as good as I got, though—trust me! [*He dives both hands into his jacket-pockets, produces a number of paper roses, and tosses them on to the settee, then into his trousers-pockets and repeats the performance.*] There! Roses—roses all the way!

HATTIE [*to behind the settee*]. Oh, aren't they lovely? Didn't the lady mind, Father?

SAMUEL. Mind? She loved it!

[*Laughs, then starts to brush the confetti from his shoulders.*]

ALICE. Samuel! Not on to the carpet, please!

SAMUEL [*still brushing*]. Where d'you expect me to brush it on to—the ceiling?

HATTIE [*leaning over the back of the settee—picking up one or two of the paper flowers*]. May I have these, Father?

ALICE. No, Hattie, you may not! Put the horrid things down at once! There's no knowing where they've been!

SAMUEL. Ha-ha!

ALICE [*starting to go to Samuel*]. And, Samuel, do please take off your hat, and sit down!

[*He takes off his hat. A number of paper roses fall from within it. Hattie gives a little squeal of laughter. Alice stops abruptly, then backs a step.*]

SAMUEL [*very solemnly*]. There, now! Let that be a lesson, Alice. If anyone had told you you'd live to see roses come

tumbling out of your husband's hat, you'd have called him a damned liar.

[*He sits in the easy-chair. Alice opens her mouth to speak, but the words will not come. She turns quickly and moves towards the window, halting just before she reaches it.*]

HATTIE [*during Alice's move—going to beside Samuel's chair*]. Oh, Father! Oh, Father, I *do* like you when you've been to the dentist! You're ever so much nicer! Do have lots and lots more teeth out, will you? [*Leaning over him*] You're all scented, too, aren't you? You smell like Mr Braby!

ALICE [*turning from the window—going to by the right end of the settee*]. Hattie, will you please go to your room at once, and—and read or something? Now, do as I say, dear, and don't argue.

HATTIE [*rebelliously*]. Oh, no, Mother, I don't want to! I want to stay with Father! Oh, *please* let me!

ALICE [*firmly*]. You heard what I said, Hattie. Go to your room at once.

HATTIE [*turning to him—pleadingly*]. Father—Father, I don't have to, do I?

SAMUEL [*growling at her*]. Go on with you! You do as your ma says, and let's have none of your blasted lip, d'you hear?

HATTIE [*stepping back—very startled*]. Oh! [*Frightened by his tone—starting to go to Alice*] Oh, Mother, did you hear what Father said?

SAMUEL [*struggling to his feet*]. See here, are you doing as you're told, or am I to fetch you one over the ear?

[*He takes a threatening step towards her. She immediately darts to the doorway.*]

HATTIE [*pausing there—with sudden dignity*]. All right, then, I will go to my room. And in case you don't know, it's only common little girls who call their mothers "Ma."

[*She hurries off. Samuel thrusts his hands into his trousers-pockets and starts to stroll towards down-stage left. Alice watches him for a moment in silence, half bewildered, half afraid. Then :*

ALICE [*in front of the settee*]. Samuel, why are you behaving like this? If I didn't know you better, I—really, I should think you'd been drinking.

SAMUEL [*down-stage left*]. Then you don't know me as well as you thought you did, 'cause I have been drinking.

ALICE. What?

SAMUEL [*sitting in the armchair, his legs sprawled out in front of him*]. I had two double-whiskies at the Green Dragon, and if it hadn't been for the laws in this glorious land of Freedom, I'd have knocked a few more back.

ALICE [*staring at him—aghast*]. You—you've actually been sitting in a public-house?

SAMUEL. No. I leaned up against the counter. It's more cosy that way.

ALICE [*a little nearer to him*]. And—and you drank whisky? Whisky!

SAMUEL [*with heavy sarcasm*]. That's right, Alice. I didn't rub it into my scalp or clean my teeth with it: I just drank it in the ordinary way.

ALICE. It will do terrible things to your liver, Samuel, you know that it will!

SAMUEL. Let it! My liver's been petted and pampered long enough. It's time it faced a few stern facts. [*Hiccups—his hand to in front of his mouth*] Pardon me.

[*She looks at him helplessly, then goes to beside his chair.*

ALICE [*making an effort to speak calmly*]. Samuel, listen to me: it's perfectly clear what's happened: the gas at the dentist's has thoroughly upset you. It was the same with Uncle Foster, I remember. He cried like a baby for hours afterwards.

SAMUEL. I never felt less like crying in my life.

ALICE. I dare say it was a very difficult tooth, dear, and they had to give you an extra-large dose. I'm sure that must be it.

SAMUEL. All I know is, there was a lot of noise going on when they gave it to me. The carnival procession was just going past. And all of a sudden there was some shouting, and the band stopped playing . . . and they told me afterwards there'd been an accident: Scum Braby had been knocked down and hurt.

ALICE. That horrible man! I suppose he was drunk!

SAMUEL. As a lord, I bet! [*Louder*] Good old Scum!

ALICE [*soothingly*]. *Ssh*, dear, hush! . . . No—now, d'you know what I'd do if I were you? I'd slip upstairs, pop into bed, and have forty winks. [*Persuasively*] Now, do, dear, and I promise you, you'll wake up a different being.

SAMUEL. Then why not try it yourself? You might wake up with bright gold hair, like the barmaid at the Green Dragon.

[He rises and starts to move towards the window. She makes an attempt to speak, but fails, then goes to the easy-chair and sits.]

[Speaking during his move] Lovely gold hair it was, all piled up on top, and a diamond butterfly stuck in it. *[Alice produces a handkerchief and makes little dabs at her eyes and the tip of her nose.]* Nothing standoffish about her, either. Called me "ducks" in no time, and let me play with the charms on her bangle.

ALICE [*tearfully*]. I—I must say I little thought, Samuel, I'd live to hear you comparing me to a barmaid.

SAMUEL. Don't worry. I'm not. There's no comparison at all.

ALICE [*with a sob*]. Oh!

SAMUEL [*turning—seeing her*]. And for God's sake, Alice,

don't start snivelling! You look like a hen with hay fever. [*Starting to cross to her—taking a small jewel-case from his jacket-pocket*] Here, I've just remembered I've got something for you. Dry your eyes, and take a look at this!

[*He tosses the case on to her lap, then goes and sits on the left end of the settee. Alice gives a few more dabs at her eyes, then places her handkerchief on the arm of the easy-chair, and opens the case rather gingerly, as though afraid that some trick is being played on her.*]

ALICE [*exclaiming*]. Oh!—oh, Samuel! The little brooch with the seed pearls! Oh, *isn't* it sweet?

SAMUEL [*laconically*]. Glad you like it. I don't think it's much of a thing, myself.

ALICE. Oh, but it's so plain and so ladylike. . . . How very, very nice of you to think of me, dear!

SAMUEL [*carelessly*]. I happened to go into Murphy's to ask if they'd mended that clock, and the brooch was lying on the counter, and I remembered you saying you fancied it.

ALICE [*admiring it*]. I do hope it wasn't terribly expensive, Samuel.

SAMUEL [*stretching his legs out on the settee*]. Didn't cost me a cent.

ALICE. Oh . . . oh, you just brought it away on approval?

SAMUEL. That's right. [*With a chuckle*] And I'd certainly like to see the look of approval on old Murphy's face when he finds it's gone.

[*There is a moment of complete silence while the significance of his words slowly dawns upon her. Her expression changes, her whole body stiffens, she looks first at the brooch, then towards where he is lying, then at the brooch again. Then, suddenly, she snaps the case to, springs to her feet, and tosses it*]

on to the mantelshef. Samuel has closed his eyes, as though about to drop off to sleep. She hurries round to behind the settee.

ALICE. Samuel! Samuel! It isn't true, is it? It couldn't be true! [*He does not open his eyes. Leaning over, she seizes his shoulders and shakes him.*] Samuel, answer me at once!

SAMUEL [*opening his eyes*]. Eh?

ALICE. That brooch—you didn't—steal it—did you?

SAMUEL. Old Murphy shouldn't leave things lying about. Teach him a lesson.

ALICE [*staring down at him—appalled*]. You—*did* steal it! Oh!—oh, my God! [*She turns and moves blindly up-stage.*] Oh, my God, what shall we——? [*She goes distractedly to by the window—then turns to face into the room.*] Samuel, don't you realize what this means? They'll send you to prison! [*Going quickly to by the right end of the settee*] You, of all people, to do such a thing! Listen to me: you must get up at once, and take it back to the shop! Tell them you—you picked it up by mistake!

SAMUEL. But I didn't. I'm surprised at you, asking me to tell a lie, Alice. Really, I am.

[He raises himself into a sitting position.

[She stares at him, helplessly, for a moment, then moves to in front of the settee.

ALICE. Samuel, what—what *is* this dreadful thing that's happened to you? You went out of this house an honest, upright man, and you've come back to it a thief and a drunkard!—I don't understand!—I feel I'm going mad!—I—I'm even beginning to wonder if you really are my husband, or if you're some horrible man who just *looks* like him!

SAMUEL [*rising*]. How very perplexing for you, dear! [*Strolling towards down-stage right*] Don't fret yourself: I'm your husband all right—Samuel Taylor Twemlow—Taylor

after my maternal grandmother, an old bitch if ever there was one.

[She is still looking at him with ever-increasing horror and dismay; then suddenly she sinks back upon the settee.]

ALICE *[her hands twisting together in her lap]*. It's a judgment on me! That's what it is—a judgment!

SAMUEL *[down-stage right]*. Eh?

[During the following speech he takes the silver ash-tray from the bureau, and, with a furtive air, slips it into his jacket-pocket.]

ALICE. I wasn't contented with you as you were. I told myself that you were pompous, narrow-minded, and dull. I persuaded myself that I wasn't really happy. There were moments when I even envied Mrs Braby that wretch of a husband of hers, because I thought that life with such a man would be more gay, more—more *like* life. *[Catching sight of the ash-tray disappearing into his pocket—breaking off]* And what are you doing with that ash-tray?

SAMUEL. This? *[Staring bewilderedly at the thing in his hand]*
Oh . . . I dunno. *[He replaces it on the bureau.]*

ALICE *[rising]*. You see? You simply don't know what you're doing! *[Starting to go to him—desperately]* Samuel, we can't go on like this! Let me send for the doctor at once! Please, Samuel!

SAMUEL. What do I want a doctor for? I'm all right!

ALICE *[clutching at his arm]*. You're not! How can you say that you're all right, when you behave like this? We'll explain everything to Dr Redfern, and—and——

SAMUEL *[loudly]*. You're bringing no doctor near me—and, for God's sake, stop your nagging, *[dragging his arm free]* and stop pawing me about, or I'll land you one!

[For a split second she seems unable to move, then she starts for the doorway, as though to hurry blindly]

from the room. She is half-way to the door when Mrs Braby appears in the hall. Alice halts abruptly. Mrs Braby is wearing a battered hat and a shabby coat, and her manner is suggestive of one who has just seen a great wonder performed, and who has not altogether enjoyed the experience.

MRS BRABY. I'm sorry, ma'am, to intrude, but could I just 'ave a word with you?

ALICE [*distractedly*]. Oh—I'm afraid I can't talk to you now, Mrs Braby. You see, I—

SAMUEL [*loudly—crossing to by the fireplace*]. Stuff and nonsense! You come right in, and make yourself at home, Mrs B.! Democracy for ever! Come and sit down and loosen your stays, and tell us how my old pal Scum is!

MRS BRABY [*very startled by his manner*]. Er—thank you, sir. [*To Alice as she ventures timidly into the room*] It were that clap of thunder, just after the procession started. An 'orse took fright and knocked Joe flat in the gutter.

SAMUEL. Right outside the dentist's. Just as I was being put to bye-byes. How's the old basket feeling now, eh?

MRS BRABY [*after a frightened look at him—addressing herself to Alice*]. They took 'im into a chemist's and brought 'im round and bandaged 'is 'ead, and—and 'e's sitting in the kitchen now—and if you please, ma'am, 'e says I'm to go 'ome with 'im at once!

ALICE [*making an effort to speak naturally*]. I hope he isn't badly hurt, Mrs Braby.

MRS BRABY. I don't know, ma'am. 'E's . . . acting very peculiar. I—I can't make 'im out at all.

SAMUEL. Don't you worry, Mrs B.! A good old session to-night at the Green Dragon, and Scum'll be good as new! And what's more, we'll start the cure right now. Alice, where's that brandy? Bring it here! [*Striding out into the hall—shouting*] Scum! Scum! Ahoy, there! Come out of

that kitchen, you old rip! It's time for your medicine! [*To Alice*] I've asked you once for that brandy! Where is it?

ALICE [*starting to go to him*]. Samuel, please—oh, please—

SAMUEL [*shouting*]. The brandy, woman! Are you deaf?

ALICE [*halting—quelled*]. It's—in the hat-box under the spare-room bed.

SAMUEL. Oh, my God, what a place to keep it!

[*He hurries off right. A brief silence. Mrs Braby looks towards the doorway, then at Alice.*]

MRS BRABY [*hesitantly*]. The master don't seem quite 'imself, eether, do 'e, ma'am?

ALICE [*not looking at her—clasping her hands together, and twisting them agitatedly—moving to down-stage right*]. No—he's—he's not very well— [*Down-stage right—looking at Mrs Braby now*] Mrs Braby, I'm so worried and unhappy, I don't know what to do!

MRS BRABY. Why, ma'am? . . .

ALICE. You were right: Mr Twemlow isn't himself at all. He couldn't possibly be less himself. He went out of this house a man of principle; he came back to it a—a libertine.

MRS BRABY. Oh, no, not one o' them, ma'am, surely.

ALICE. A libertine! You heard him just now, roaring for brandy, didn't you?

[*She drags the chair away from the bureau, and sits, her back to the audience.*]

MRS BRABY [*moving down to by the left arm of the settee*]. Why, what the 'eck's 'appened to the menfolk? I'm sure, when mine walked in just now, I 'ardly knew 'im. 'E's gone all—all unnatural, ma'am.

- [*Faking "when mine walked in" as his cue, Braby has appeared in the hall. He is wearing the Bacchus costume, though the lower part is now concealed by a white apron tied round his waist.*]

There is a large piece of sticking-plaster on his forehead, and he is carrying the vine wreath in his hand. At the end of Mrs Braby's speech he gives a gentle little cough, to attract attention.

BRABY [*in the doorway*]. You'll excuse me, ma'am, but if Martha's quite ready, I'd like 'er to come 'ome with me now.

MRS BRABY. Joel [*Alice rises.*]

BRABY [*coming a little farther into the room*]. You'll excuse my attire, too, ma'am, I 'opes. Cook 'as very kindly lent me a h'apron to 'ide what should be 'id.

ALICE [*faintly*]. Mr Braby—

BRABY. When I thinks, ma'am, of 'ow, not a hour ago, I was exposing my knees to all and sundry, I could sink through the floor with shame and mortification. . . . If you're quite ready, Martha dear. [*To Alice*] My wife won't be obliging ladies no more. I'm to be breadwinner now, ma'am.

MRS BRABY [*staring at him*]. You don't mean—you're going to work, Joe?

BRABY. Soon as I can get into my trousers I'm off to look for a job—and the 'arder it is, the better I'll like it.

MRS BRABY [*awestricken—almost tearfully*]. Oh, Joe, don't talk like that! No, don't! I can't bear it! [*To Alice*] Oh, ma'am, you see 'ow 'e is! Whatever am I to do?

[Alice makes a little helpless gesture, and moves to by the window.]

MRS BRABY [*to him*]. D'you feel any pain anywhere?

BRABY. All I feel is . . . respectability. It's quite painless, dear. You'd 'ardly know you'd got it. [*Moving round the right arm of the settee towards her*] Come, now, and let's be getting along. It'll be the first time you and me 'ave walked 'ome together in twenty years. The street'll fair rock with the throwing up of windows, eh?

MRS BRABY [*backing as he nears her*]. No—no, Joe, I couldn't—and you all changed, like a stranger—it wouldn't be decent!

BRABY [*gently*]. Now, Martha, that's foolish talk. You come 'ome with me, and—and you shall make me a nice bowl of gruel.

MRS BRABY. Gruel? You?

BRABY. I've took a sudden fancy for it—very thin. [*Turning towards Alice*] Won't you speak to 'er, ma'am, and show 'er where 'er duty lies?

MRS BRABY. It's no use, Joe, I can't 'elp it! I go 'ot all over at the very thought! [*Towards Alice*] I do, ma'am, really! I—I just can't think of 'im as my 'usband any more!

ALICE [*moving away from the window—with the air of one who has suddenly stumbled upon the truth*]. And you're quite right—he isn't—he's mine!

[*The positions now are: Mrs Braby by the fireplace, her back to it; Braby in front of the left end of the settee, looking towards Alice; Alice behind the right end of the settee. There is a split second of silence. Then:*

MRS BRABY. Yours, ma'am?

BRABY [*at the same time*]. Eh?

ALICE [*haltingly—struggling to express herself*]. It's something I read about—a long time ago. . . . Two men, a priest and an acrobat, were knocked unconscious in a railway smash—and when they recovered—they'd—they'd exchanged personalities. . . . The acrobat started to preach a sermon—and the priest swarmed up a telegraph pole, and hung by his teeth from the wires. [*As they stare at her, uncomprehendingly*] Don't you see what I mean? [*Still staring, they shake their heads.*] You were unconscious outside the dentist's at the very moment when Mr Twemlow was

unconscious *inside* the dentist's, and—[*lamely*] and that's when it must have happened.

[*From some distant part of the house Samuel's voice is heard roaring out the song "Little Brown Jug."*]

There! You hear that? Mr Braby, your own body's here in this room, but your—your real spirit's out there, singing in Mr Twemlow's body! *He's* still got *his* body, and *you've* still got *your* body, but——

BRABY [*checking her—with upraised hand*]. Oh, 'ush, ma'am, please! All this talk about bodies! And from a lady, too! It isn't nice.

MRS BRABY. Nice or not, Joe, I'm beginning to see what she means. You and Mr Twemlow 'ave some'ow got all mixed up, and I'm—part married to you, and part to 'im. Is that it, ma'am?

ALICE. Well—yes—in a way.

MRS BRABY [*sitting abruptly in the easy-chair*]. Oh, dear. It do make things awkward, don't it?

BRABY [*to beside her chair—sternly*]. Martha Braby, get out of that chair at once, and come 'ome with me! [*To Alice*] And I'll thank you, ma'am, not to go putting loose ideas into my wife's 'ead. What would Mr Twemlow say if 'e 'eard you?

SAMUEL'S VOICE [*off-stage—much nearer—singing*]. "Hah! Hah! Hah! Hee! Hee! Hee! Little brown jug, don't I love thee!" [*Appearing in the hall—brandishing a bottle*] "Hah! Hah! Hah! Hee! Hee! Hee! Little brown jug, don't I love thee!" [*In the doorway*] "Little brown jug, don't" [*slower*] "I . . . love . . . theeee!"

[*On the "Theeee" he flourishes the bottle aloft, and strikes an attitude, which he holds for a second or two. Then:*

Scum, my boy, behold! A present from Darkest Africa

—or under the spare-room bed! A bottle of the best, old man, and guaranteed to warm the cockles of your heart! [*Coming into the room—slamming the bottle down on the table*] Now, let's see, what do we want? Aha!—glasses! [*Going quickly to the sideboard*] Mrs B., you'll join us in a brandy and brandy, I hope.

MRS BRABY [*rising*]. Er—no, sir, thank you, I . . .

[*Samuel stoops to open the sideboard cupboard. Simultaneously Braby hurries round the settee, to by the table.*]

SAMUEL [*straightening himself*]. Alice, where is the corkscrew?

ALICE. There isn't one in the house.

SAMUEL [*to Braby*]. You hear that? No corkscrew in the house! Words that should never be spoken in an Englishman's home! [*To Alice*] Shame on you!

BRABY [*snatching up the bottle from the table*]. Mr Twemlow—listen to me—there's only one way to deal with this—only one rightful thing to be done!

SAMUEL. Break the neck off the bottle? It's risky.

BRABY [*vigorously*]. Pour it down the sink, sir! Every single drain, drop, and dribble! Down the sink with it, sir, and out of the way of temptation and 'arm!

SAMUEL [*staring at him*]. Eh?

BRABY [*brandishing the bottle*]. Show yourself a man, sir! Think of your wife and child, and away with this poison before it's so much as wetted your lips!

SAMUEL [*starting to go to him*]. What's the matter with you, man? Have you gone mad? And, for God's sake, stop shaking that bottle about! It's brandy, not a bottle of sauce! Here—give it to me!

[*He makes a grab for the bottle. Braby whisks it behind his back.*]

BRABY. No, sir, I will not! I'd as soon put a poisonous

snake in the 'ands of a h'innocent babe. [*Holding the bottle behind his back—warding Samuel off with his free arm—starting to back towards the window*] It's no use! My mind's made up! If you 'aven't the strength to save yourself, then I must do it for you! This stuff's going down the sink!

[*He gives Samuel a little push, and is about to dash to the doorway. Samuel is there before him.*]

SAMUEL [*in the doorway—barring the way*]. Damn it! Put that bottle down on the table, will you?

BRABY [*advancing towards him*]. I'll put it down on your 'ead, sir, first—and if that's the only way to bring you to your senses, then I will! And I mean it!

[*He is near to Samuel now, holding the bottle threateningly aloft.*]

MRS BRABY. Joe! Joe!—— [*She gives a little scream.*] No, you're not to!

[*Simultaneously Alice, down right, takes a few steps forward, gives a little gasp, then stops, and covers her eyes with her hands. For one moment, the bottle is poised over Samuel's head. Braby even makes a feint, as though to bring it crashing down; then he lowers the bottle to his side.*]

BRABY. Right, then! Out in the garden with it! [*Starting for the window*] 'Url it to smithereens against the garden wall! [*In the window opening—grasping the bottle by the neck and pointing it at Samuel*] Mr Twemlow, you'll thank me for this, one day!

[*He is gone. Alice has uncovered her eyes. The next second Samuel dashes across to the window, and out. Mrs Braby hurries agitatedly towards the window, stopping when about a yard away from it. Moving at the same time, Alice goes to in front of the settee.*]

MRS BRABY [*her hands clasped*]. Oh, ma'am—the master's

after Joe, like a raging blood'ound! 'E's caught 'im up and grabbed 'im! Joe's trying to get away! Oh!—oh, ma'am, they've both fell down, and the bottle's rolled away!

ALICE [*in front of the settee—very tense*]. What are they doing now? Tell me!

MRS BRABY. They're just lying there—like corpses. [*She takes a step forward.*] Oh, supposing they're dead!

ALICE [*sharply—commandingly*]. Stay where you are! Leave them, and . . . see what happens!

[*There is a loud peal of thunder. As this dies away the carnival music is heard again in the distance.*]

MRS BRABY. There, now! Look at that!

ALICE. What?

MRS BRABY [*breathlessly*]. It's Joe. . . . 'E's moving. . . . 'E's getting to 'is feet. . . . 'E's looking round, all dazed-like. . . . The master's moving too. 'E's just flapped 'is 'and. . . . Joe's whipped off 'is apron, ma'am. . . . [*Excitedly*] 'E's—yes, 'e's seen the bottle and grabbed it, and 'e's running for the gate with it, 'ell for leather!

BRABY'S VOICE [*offstage—in the distance*]. Sammy Sour-puss! Sammy Sour-puss! Yahooooo! Yahooooo!

MRS BRABY [*overjoyed*]. There, ma'am, 'ear that! Oh, thank God! 'E's 'imself again! My Joe's 'imself again! [*Then, backing a little from the window*] The master's on 'is feet too, now. . . . 'E's—'e's coming this way, ma'am, walking very slow.

ALICE [*quickly*]. Please go now, Mrs Braby. Leave me alone with him.

MRS BRABY [*starting for the doorway*]. I'll off with my things, and finish my brasses, eh? [*In the doorway*] Oh, ma'am, everything's turned out all right! A real, 'appy ending, and I bet my Joe'll be drunker to-night than ever before. . . . I expect I ought to be sorry, but some'ow I'm not. It's funny, 'ow you get used to a thing.

[She goes off towards left. A pause. Alice goes quickly to the easy-chair, and sits. Samuel appears in the window-opening. He is looking dazed and unsure of himself, and for a moment he stands on the threshold, gazing slowly round the room, as though not altogether certain of his surroundings. Then:]

SAMUEL [*quietly—a little unsteadily*]. Alice, is that you?

ALICE [*with forced calmness*]. Why, yes, of course. [*As he comes a little farther into the room*] Are you all right, dear?

SAMUEL [*after passing his hand over his forehead*]. I think so. . . . I felt a little strange just now, . . . Not quite myself for a moment. . . . Tell me, Alice, has something been happening?

ALICE. Well—you went to the dentist's, you know—and—

SAMUEL. I believe the gas must have quite thoroughly upset me. . . . A most peculiar feeling. . . . It's passing off now, thank goodness.

ALICE [*as though to test his reaction*]. Perhaps if you were to have a little brandy, dear.

SAMUEL. Certainly not! [*Quite in his old style*] I am not one of those, Alice, who must reach for the brandy bottle on every trifling indisposition.

ALICE [*soothingly*]. No, Samuel, of course you're not.

SAMUEL [*starting for the doorway*]. I shall go to my room, and lie down for a while.

ALICE [*rising*]. Yes, I should. And—and, Samuel, you wouldn't really like me to be like a barmaid, would you?

SAMUEL [*pausing*]. A—a barmaid? My dear Alice, have you the faintest idea of what you're talking about?

ALICE. I—it was just a thought that crossed my mind.

SAMUEL [*proceeding on his way*]. I prefer not to comment on it. [*In the doorway*] You will awaken me, please, in pre-

cisely [*looking at his watch*] one hour and thirty-five minutes, with a cup of tea—china tea, of course—and very weak.

[*He goes. For a moment Alice remains quite still. The carnival music is louder now. As though suddenly becoming aware of the sound, she goes to the window and slowly closes it. She is standing there, looking out, as the curtain falls.*

Space Ship One

By John Hampden

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CHARACTERS

WILLIAM LEIGH, *engineer*

HARRY LOVELL, *engaged to Katherine*

PROFESSOR JOHN WITNEY, *designer of the ship*

THE VOICE OF KATHERINE, *Witney's daughter*

THE VOICE OF THE ENEMY

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The setting of the play can be much simplified, if necessary, and designed so that it can be set and struck very quickly.

Applications regarding performances of this play should be addressed to Mr John Hampden, Kenilworth, Park Hill, Carshalton, Surrey. The fee for a performance by amateurs is one guinea.

Space Ship One

The scene is the upper cabin of the first Space Ship, which is rapidly approaching the moon.

As we see it, the cabin has a semicircular roof and a flat rear wall. The whole interior is painted grey. The lighting is a fairly bright amber. The only window, in the centre of the rear wall, is a tall ellipse, through which we glimpse the surface of the moon—an encrusted disk suffused with a pale green light, in sharp contrast with the deep blue-blackness of space beyond. The rim of the moon makes an angle of about seventy degrees with the horizontal; it tilts slowly towards the horizontal as the play proceeds, until the more rapid movement occurs.

Left-centre (the audience's left) a broad stanchion stretches from floor to ceiling, and at eye-level this has a projecting, hooded binocular, with various switches and levers beside it. This is the periscope through which the ship can be conned. The binocular projects at an angle of about twenty degrees with the rear wall, so that a man using it is almost facing right. There is a cross-bar which he can hold with one hand on each side of the periscope at about waist-level.

To the right of it and nearer the rear wall is the engineer's control-board, which incorporates a radar screen. We can see only the back of it, for it faces the rear wall. There is a row of switches along the top of it, and moving the full length of each side is a long, erect lever. The engineer sits facing us, astride a saddle at the foot of the board. He is well placed to take

- verbal instructions from a navigator at the periscope. His left hand rarely leaves the left-hand lever, which he pulls towards him with small, fairly regular jerks as the ship moves towards the moon. The right-hand lever he shifts backward and*

forward with varying movements, and his hand leaves it occasionally to snap on or off one of the switches at the head of the board. Every movement of levers or switches causes a change of lighting on the control-board, a flicker of red, blue, yellow, or white, which we cannot see, but which is just bright enough to be reflected plainly from the face and shoulders of the engineer.

On the rear wall, right of the window, is a television screen (out of action) and a loud-speaker with a red warning lamp-bulb above it (not yet lit) and a call-key to the right of it at shoulder-level. Beside this is a narrow door. Well down to the right is a bunk, without bedclothes, but made comfortable by a mattress and pillow of thick aerated rubber. Opposite this, well down to the left of the periscope, is a lightly built table on which stands a tray holding whiskey, soda, and glasses.

The total effect has a suggestion of nightmare—a nightmare of mechanical efficiency.

When the curtain rises William Leigh is seated at the controls. He is a dark-haired man of thirty-five or so, concentrated, silent, a little saturnine. He is wearing a grey, high-necked woollen sweater, grey flannel trousers, and black shoes. Harry Lovell, similarly dressed, is sound asleep on the bunk. He is a fair, handsome, athletic young man of about twenty-five.

WILL. Harry! [He mutters to himself "77-32,¹ 77-34," and moves the right lever. A red light flickers across his face.] Harry!
[Harry stirs a little.]

Harry, wake up!

[Harry rolls over sleepily and sits on the edge of the bunk, rubbing his eyes. He looks at his wrist-watch.]

HARRY. Nearly six [yawning]. Soon be breakfast-time.

WILL. 77-36.

¹ This should be spoken as "Seventy-seven thirty-two," etc.

HARRY. Would you like me to take over, Will?

WILL. No, thanks. I'm quite fresh. But you asked me to call you by six.

HARRY. Yes, thanks, of course. Wanted to make sure of being awake when Katherine calls us. She said she would before we—*[startled to his feet]*. Great Scott! To-day we land on the moon! *[He is wide awake now.]* Are we nearly there? Are we still doing two thousand miles an hour?

[He crosses to look over Will's shoulder at the control-board.]

WILL *[a little wryly]*. Less than seventy. I've been using the bow-jets for the past three hours.

HARRY *[laughing]*. Well, I suppose we shouldn't make a happy landing at two thousand. Where are we now?

WILL. 31/27¹ on the grid. *[To himself, as he moves both levers]* 77-38.

HARRY. And where do we land?

WILL. About 21/18. But the Professor will con her in. *[He stiffens.]*

HARRY. Hallo! What's happening?

[He peers a little anxiously at the board.]

WILL. We're just entering the sigma belt. The Professor said it would put the radar out of action. Will you call him? I can't fly her blind at this stage.

HARRY. He may be still asleep. Shall I con her?

WILL. No, thanks. He asked to be called. Will you get him?

[As Harry turns towards the door Professor Witney enters through it—a strongly built, intensely vital man of sixty-five or so, dressed like the others. He is at the moment very uneasy.]

WITNEY. Good-morning. What's amiss, Will?

[His tone makes Will look at him sharply.]

¹ This should be spoken as "Thirty-one, dash, twenty-seven," etc.

HARRY. Good-morning, sir.

[*He crosses to his bunk and sits down.*]

WILL. Good-morning, sir. The sigma belt. Radar out of action.

WITNEY. Right. [*He goes to the periscope and takes his stand with his hands on the cross-bar. For the first few moments he presses his forehead against the hood. His voice is tense.*] 77-38-40. 77-44-48-56. [*Pause.*] 77-52. Hold it.

[*He remains at the periscope, looking into it at intervals.*]

WILL [*repeating the figures as they are given him and moving his levers for each*]. 77-38-40,—77-44-48-56,—77-52.

HARRY [*yawning*]. What I want is a cold sluice.

[*He goes out by the door.*]

WILL [*looking anxiously at Witney*]. Anything wrong, sir?

WITNEY. Not with the ship, so far as I can see. How's she been behaving?

WILL. Perfectly.

WITNEY. Altitude?

WILL. 29.

WITNEY. Speed?

WILL. 67. I switched on the second and fourth bow-jets at 2.45 A.M.—and the first and third at 3. I've been steadily decelerating since.

WITNEY. Good. 77-54.

WILL. 77-54.

WITNEY. Propellants?

WILL. 3-0-3-1-1 and 9-9-2.

WITNEY. Excellent. We can take her round the moon on the way home. [*The anxiety, which has eased from his voice, returns.*] Is there any news from home?

[*He looks sharply at the loud-speaker.*]

WILL. No response for an hour. Neither 'phone nor television. I'll try them again. [*He taps sharply on a key:* 1-2, 1-2, 1-2. *Pause.* 1-2, 1-2, 1-2.] Nothing, sir.

WITNEY [*concentrating on the periscope again*]. 77-58.

WILL. 77-58. [*There is a slight pause.*]

WITNEY [*in a changed voice*]. Do you ever dream, Will?

WILL. Not often. But I've had a recurrent dream, ever since boyhood.

WITNEY. Have your dreams ever come true?

WILL. Well, there was one queer thing—coincidence, I suppose.

WITNEY. I have never dreamed, since the War, until last night. And then—— [*He shudders.*]

WILL. You slept badly, sir?

WITNEY. Nightmares, nightmares. [*He is struggling against panic.*] Everything that I've feared—every horror—— [*He controls himself.*] When did you hear last from base?

WILL. At 4.45. Routine check from Jackson.

[*Re-enter Harry, running a comb through his damp hair.*]

WITNEY. And I couldn't get them on my set. Harry, try the television key.

[*Harry crosses to it and raps out 1-2, 1-2, 1-2. There is a strained silence. He repeats the call. Silence.*]

HARRY [*looking at his watch and trying not to be infected by Witney's anxiety*]. Katherine said she'd be sure to call us before we landed, sir. [*Cheerfully*] She will.

WITNEY [*with no conviction*]. Yes. [*Looking into the periscope*] 77-60.

WILL. 77-60.

HARRY. Me for my morning soda. [*He crosses to the table.*] Will you have a drink, sir?

WITNEY. Four fingers and a dash of soda, please. [*Harry is obviously very startled, but he pours the whiskey and soda without comment and hands it to Witney at the periscope.*] Here you are, sir. [*Witney drains it quickly and puts the glass on the table.*] Drink, Will?

WILL. No, thanks.

[Harry fills a glass with soda-water and crosses to sit on his bunk.]

HARRY *[raising his glass]*. Well, here's to the First Men in the Moon! *[He drains his glass.]* I can't quite believe even yet that I'm one of them. When do we land?

WILL. In about ten minutes. At the foot of Tycho.

WITNEY. As near the root of the long ray as we can make it. 78-4.

WILL *[moving his levers, while the light flickers once again across his face]*. 78-4.

HARRY. That's where you put the ship down last month, isn't it?

WILL. Yes.

HARRY *[enjoying his own wonderment]*. A round trip of over half a million miles with no one on board except three sheep, and they came back as happy as they went.

WITNEY. 78-12. It was a necessary test. But our own flight to Australia and back was more valuable in many respects.

WILL. 78-12 it is.

WITNEY. Will, please try your 'phone.

[Will raps out the call once more. A pause, and he repeats it. Witney and Harry look anxiously at the television screen. Will makes a third call. Again there is a strained silence. They all move uneasily. Witney looks into the periscope.]

HARRY *[trying to escape from the tension]*. This trip has seemed as easy as tootling across Mercia in my little helicopter. Except that I never reach twenty-five thousand miles an hour. Phew! *[He crosses and replaces his glass.]*

WITNEY *[with an effort to speak in his ordinary voice]*. The ship has behaved well.

HARRY *[returning to his seat]*. How soon do we get out after we've landed?

WITNEY. When the casing has cooled. 78-24.

WILL. 78-24.

WITNEY. As soon as we land we'll have breakfast, and then get into our air and ballast suits again for a final practice. That's the third time you've asked me that question, Harry.

HARRY [*very downcast*]. I'm—I'm sorry, sir. What with Katherine, and coming on this trip, I—I don't know where I am.

WITNEY. It's all right, my boy. Will, we must swing her on to the mark in a few moments.

WILL. Ready.

HARRY. If I hadn't had the infinite cheek to fall in love with your daughter, sir, I suppose I'd have had a very dim chance of coming.

WITNEY [*intent on the periscope*]. Her falling in love with you had something to do with it too. She knew how badly you wanted to come—and I've never been able to refuse Katherine anything. Not that she's ever asked anything unreasonable. You're a good mechanic and a hefty young fellow. And we needed—— [*He holds up his hand for silence. A tense pause. All three brace themselves against the ship's change of direction.*] 79-46, 80-12, 81-24, 82-30, 86, 88-44, 88-12.

WILL [*after moving his levers for each figure*]. 88-12 it is.

[*The surface of the moon seen through the window tilts swiftly and oscillates slightly. It comes to rest with its horizon level across the window, and thereafter rises rapidly until it fills the whole view.*

- [*Will remains intent on the control-board, but the movements of his levers are fewer and slighter henceforward.*

Dead on the mark, sir. I can take her now.

WITNEY. I'm going to call base on my 'phone.

[He goes out through the narrow door.]

HARRY *[in a changed voice]*. Will, what's the matter with him? Is anything going wrong?

WILL. Not with the ship. She's perfect. I don't know. I've never seen him like this before. He ought to be exultant. This is the moment of his triumph, and he's worked twenty years for it.

HARRY. And how long have you?

WILL. Eight years. But for me it's been the thrill and fascination of the job, and of working with him. He's not only a genius, you know, he's a great man. But he's had something driving him, something far more insistent than his passion for scientific discovery, though that's strong enough. I've felt it in him for years, but I never had any idea of what it was till lately. For the past twelve months he's been working desperately against time. *[He moves his levers.]*

HARRY. But why?

WILL *[continuing his own train of thought]*. The moon's only a stepping-stone—this is only a practice run. It's Mars and Venus that he's reaching out to, and perhaps far beyond. He'll voyage through the solar universe till he finds what he is seeking. You've seen the new ship?

HARRY. She's prodigious.

WILL. When he first brought his specifications to the shop we couldn't believe them. We thought he'd made some incredible mistake. But there she is, almost finished. She'll take ten people—and a dozen animals, and vast stores. Her cruising speed is twenty thousand miles an hour, and her range of flight— Do you know how he spent the evening after this ship came home from her first voyage to the moon?

HARRY. No. I was with Katherine.

WILL. Pacing round and through the new ship, to and fro, to and fro, for hours. And when he came away at last he chalked on the bow of her—*Noah's Ark*.

[*Harry, sitting very still, draws a long, deep breath. He rubbed it out next morning.*

HARRY. Then he thinks——

[*He does not finish. Will meets his gaze steadily.*

WILL. Yes. He'll never come back.

HARRY. Is he—mad?

WILL. Only in the sense that all geniuses are mad.

HARRY. Do you mean he's not quite normal?

WILL. I mean, that he's not quite—average. [*A slight pause.*] Will you go with him?

HARRY [*shifting uneasily*]. I—I—will you?

WILL. Yes. That has always—— [*He breaks off to concentrate his attention on the control-board. He snaps a switch and moves the right-hand lever a little. Light flickers once again over his face and chest.*] Well, I suppose we've always taken it for granted that I'm going.

HARRY. Will he ask me?

WILL. Mrs Witney and Katherine are going.

HARRY. So *that* is what she was going to tell me.

WILL. You know what they are to him, don't you?

HARRY. Since I've had Katherine I've begun to realize. But——

[*The door is thrown open, and Witney enters violently. His face is distorted. He is possessed with fear. Will, glancing at him, stiffens abruptly. Harry is rigid. Witney turns sharply to the television screen and raps out the call, 1-2, 1-2, 1-2. There is a dreadful silence. He repeats the call.*

WITNEY [*looking from Will to Harry, speaking in a high, strangled voice*]. No sign—and all night they've been crying out to me—Judith and Katherine——

[His voice breaks. He sags, and puts out a hand to Will's shoulder to keep himself from falling.]

We're too late, Will—too late.

WILL *[looking up at him and speaking calmly]*. I need your help with the navigation, sir.

[Witney struggles for self-control. He walks like an old man to the periscope and peers into it.]

89-56.

WITNEY *[speaking with great difficulty]*. 89-52.

WILL *[moving the right-hand lever]*. 89-52. We don't land on that rill, do we, sir? Would you like her between the rill and the long ray, or to the left of the rill?

WITNEY. Between them. I—I suppose we must look at the ray.

[He is regaining his self-control as his fear gives way to despair. But he is an old man, chilled and defeated. The young men, infected by his fear, are struggling against it.]

HARRY. How long till we land, sir?

WITNEY *[hesitant]*. Five minutes, or less—89-54.

WILL. 89-54.

HARRY *[seeking to divert his mind]*. And how long till we land on Mars?

WITNEY *[his voice even now, but dead]*. If you had asked me that yesterday I should have said 129 days. But that was yesterday. To-day— *[His voice changes.]* Do you know what day it is, Harry?

HARRY. The first of May.

WITNEY. May Day. They used to sing a hymn on Magdalen Tower. I remember how magical the green shadows were along the Cherwell, and the nip in the air, and the water-vole that sat up to watch my punt go by. I've often wondered why he wasn't afraid. That was the morning I met Judith. *[He can smile now.]* She upset her

canoe, and she couldn't swim. I fished her out of the Cher into my punt and gave her towels, and hot coffee out of a Thermos, and took the canoe in tow. We couldn't find her paddle. I missed two lectures that morning. We got engaged next term.

HARRY. Was she as—was she like Katherine, sir?

WITNEY. Very like her. They don't sing the May Day hymn now. That was stopped, years ago.

HARRY. Well, yes. I suppose all that sort of thing may have been useful once—

WITNEY [*under his breath*]. Useful!

HARRY.—though I don't see how. But we had to keep our lead, didn't we, sir, and if the nation had gone on wasting time on the arts—!

WITNEY. Yes. That is part of the price we have paid.

HARRY. Well . . . We have kept our lead, haven't we? Atomic engineering, biochemistry, synthetic foods, television, radar, rockets . . . This little gun that I've brought along in case we meet anything nasty on the moon is about the finest thing—

[*He stoops, intending to get it out from under his bunk.*]

WITNEY [*turning on him in a burst of fury*]. God in heaven! Are we to carry scientifically organized murder into the whole universe? Is *that* the whole destiny of man?

[*He recovers himself slowly and turns back to the periscope.*]

WILL [*again intervening judiciously*]. That small crater, sir, 21/19 on the grid: we'd better not land in it, had we?

WITNEY. No, no. Make the landing-point 21/17. Check her to 89-48.

WILL. 89-48.

WITNEY. Close all shutters.

WILL. Yes, sir.

[He snaps a switch, and a black shutter slides down swiftly outside the window, covering it completely.]

WITNEY *[slowly to himself]*. The whole destiny of man . . .
[To Harry] Your generation knows nothing of war. But I remember. And I remember the newspapers of 1938 and '39, and the last two years.

WILL. But surely there's no comparison!

HARRY. UNO has abolished war.

WITNEY. Not since UNO abolished the International Air Police and universal inspection.

HARRY. But it's unthinkable!

WITNEY. War is always unthinkable.

HARRY. But who could want war?

WITNEY. Who wanted the Police abolished? Why did they——?

[A crackle from the radio stops him. The red bulb lights up. Katherine's voice comes through the loud-speaker, a beautiful voice, cool, clear, but now tense with a horror so great that she cannot realize it fully.]

KATHERINE. Daddy! Harry! Are you all right?

HARRY. Yes, Katherine, everything's splendid. We're just going to land.

WITNEY. Katherine, what's wrong?

KATHERINE. Oh, I've been terrified I shouldn't get through to you before they get me. You mustn't come back to England. You must land in Canada or the States.

WITNEY. Katherine, *what's wrong?*

KATHERINE. It's—it's the end of England, I think. I'm in the crow's-nest. I slept here last night in your camp-bed, so that I could talk to you this morning, before anyone came. Mother—no one's come. I—I think I'm the only one of us—left alive.

HARRY. Kathy!

KATHERINE. When I woke up nothing was working up here. The power was cut off. And when I looked out of the windows the sun was shining—but [*her voice fails for a moment*] the sky was full of great grey canisters, falling. They burst in the air and sprayed out a heavy, brown, oily fog. Horrible. All London's covered with it. As far as I can see there's only the fog. A few chimney-stacks rising through it, and the cross of St Paul's, shining gold. That's all that's left. London's—dead.

WITNEY. Katherine, where's your mother?

KATHERINE. She was down there, Daddy. It—it must have been quick. Nothing could live under that. And then the canisters began dropping men in armour, with gas-masks like helmets and a sort of parachute I've never seen before. And guns.

WITNEY. You haven't got a gas-mask, have you?

KATHERINE. No, and it wouldn't be any good. This building's full of them. I can hear them. *They* must have put the power on.

HARRY. Who are they?

KATHERINE. I don't know. They'll find the ladder soon, and me.

HARRY. Kathy! You *must* escape——

KATHERINE. How can I? I must say good-bye to you. If only there were television up here, so that I could see you. Is Will there?

WILL. I'm here.

KATHERINE. Good-bye, Will, and good luck to you.

WILL [*tonelessly*]. Good-bye, Katherine.

KATHERINE. Harry darling, good-bye. You have been sweet to me. We should have made something of life. [*Her voice breaks.*] You must marry some one else—presently. [*Harry, who has been standing as though frozen, covers his eyes with*

his arm and reels across the bunk. He throws himself on his knees beside it, sobbing.] Good-bye, darling.

HARRY [*struggling for utterance*]. Kathy, Kathy.

KATHERINE. Daddy, how's the ship?

WITNEY. Perfect. We land in a few moments.

KATHERINE. I'm so proud of you. The first men in the moon. You'll go to Canada, won't you? Your genius will be needed. The fight is only just beginning. I know how you hate war, but you'll have to be in this.

WITNEY. Yes, I shall have to be in this—if there is a Canada. This is the atomic war. But they wanted London—intact.

KATHERINE. They've got London intact. This is what you feared, isn't it?

WITNEY. Yes, for years now. And this time there's no margin for muddling through. Oh, Katherine!

KATHERINE. No, this is the last time. [*Her voice changing*] I know now why I've never really been afraid of anything all my life. It's because of you. And we're still together, aren't we?

WITNEY [*steadily*]. Yes, closer than ever. Kathy, I know who the invaders are. You must kill yourself.

[*Harry cries out.*

KATHERINE [*hysterically*]. No! [*She sobs for a moment.*

WITNEY. But, Katherine—think—they will know you are my daughter. If they take you alive——

KATHERINE [*controlling herself*]. Yes, yes—I must. How?

WITNEY. Have you any water?

KATHERINE. Yes. It's on.

[*She turns a tap. There is a momentary sound of running water.*

WITNEY. A tumbler half full of water. Among the test-tubes in the left-hand rack there are two corked tubes—a grey fluid in one, yellow in the other.

KATHERINE. Yes. They're half full.

WITNEY. That will be enough. Empty the yellow into the water first. Then the grey. And inhale. You'll feel nothing.

KATHERINE. Yes. [*Her voice shaking*] That old cracked tumbler of yours, Daddy— [*In terror*] They're on the ladder!

WITNEY. Be quick. Good-bye, my love.

KATHERINE [*brokenly*]. Good-bye.

[*Harry lifts his head, trying to speak, and cannot. Witney and Will are rigid. There is the sound of the liquids being poured, a cry from Katherine, the thud of a falling body, the crash of a tumbler on a stone floor, the violent opening of a door, and heavy, metallic footsteps.*]

THE VOICE OF THE ENEMY [*guttural, evil*]. Vaat ees dees? 'Oo are you? Aanswer queek!

[*Will thrusts both control levers forward with a sudden swift movement.*]

WILL [*in a toneless voice*]. We've landed.

SLOW CURTAIN

Outcast

By Ronald Hadlington

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CHARACTERS

JACOB, *an innkeeper*

GIOTTO, *an old man*

' GILDA, *a woman servant*

' RACHEL, *a girl of twenty*

PALUTTO, *a man-about-town*

A STRANGER

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton
Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New
York*

Outcast

The scene is an inn in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. About noon. There are three circular tables with stools. One table, down-stage right, below a circular counter from where wine is served; another table centre stage; and a third a little up-stage left. The back wall is broken by a window which looks out on to the street, with mountains vaguely beyond. Underneath this window is a bench. In the left wall, rather down-stage, is another smaller window with a bench beneath it. The main entrance to the room is in the left wall, up-stage. Steps lead down from the doorway into the room, suggesting the room is below the level of the street. Opposite, in the right wall, is a door leading to other apartments in the inn.

Strong sunlight is pouring into the room from the window in the back wall, causing the doorway to be half-hidden in shadow.

The curtain rises to discover the innkeeper measuring wine into a small cup. He is a fat and wheezy old Jew. Watching the operation, seated at the table down right, is an old man. He looks ill and is coughing asthmatically. At the bench underneath the window left is seated a pale, melancholy woman, playing a harp in a desultory fashion.

INNKEEPER [*as he measures wine*]. Ah, yes, business is bad, Giotto, very bad indeed. How can a man pay his taxes and buy food to live when trade is so bad? [*Taking wine to the old man*] I have the best wine in all Jerusalem, and yet no one comes any more, except you, and Palutto, and Joses now and then, and Micah the Canaanite. [*The old man has a bout of coughing.*] Why don't you get some herbs for your cough, Giotto? One of these days you'll wake up dead—and you one of my regular customers!

OLD MAN. Wake up dead! [*Cackling*] Hee, hee, hee! Wouldn't I be famous? Just like that Lazarus from Bethany, the one who was dead and buried and then woke up again. Hee, hee, hee!

INNKEEPER. Does anyone believe such pedlar's gossip? Bah!

OLD MAN [*very earnestly*]. Oh, yes. Palutto saw him. He can tell you: he was there when it happened. He saw him coming up from the tomb. Just like a ghost he was, and such a smell! Ugh, it was awful, Palutto said.

INNKEEPER [*amused*]. Pah, a shepherd's tale to pass the night away. [*Chuckling*] Palutto has seen many strange things after a pot of my very strong wine. [*Shuffles back to his counter.*]

OLD MAN. But strange things are happening these days, Jacob. Were you up at the Hill this morning? I was there. There were crowds there too. I was at the back: I couldn't see very well, but Palutto was there, right in the front, and he told me how the soldiers had come to arrest this man they call Jesus, the one everybody has been talking about. I thought there was going to be a fight, but there wasn't. But Palutto said one of the soldiers had his ear cut off, and then this Jesus put it on again as easy as lacing your sandals. [*Drinks.*] I wish there'd been a fight though. I love a fight, don't you, Jacob? And I heard tell that this Jesus was going to get an army to drive the Romans out of our land, but now he's been arrested and the Romans will never be driven away.

INNKEEPER. Quiet, you simpleton. It is not wise to speak your thoughts too openly.

OLD MAN [*nervously*]. Oh, no. No, indeed.

[Conversation lags as the old man drinks and the innkeeper busies himself behind the counter. The woman's strumming grows louder—a haunting, dismal tune. As she plays a face is seen through

the window, back, then withdrawn. It is a savage, repulsive face. None of the occupants of the room has noticed it. Suddenly, quietly, a stranger appears on the steps. Hidden in shadow, he is tall and dark. When the woman notices him she stops the music, discordantly. The innkeeper looks up and stares at the newcomer. The old man pauses in the act of sipping his wine as the stranger comes slowly into the room, the light gradually revealing the face already seen at the window. The stranger is altogether wild to look on, a wildness accentuated by the long black cloak he is wearing. When he speaks his voice is hard and grating.

STRANGER. What are you staring at, fools. [*The woman has risen, frightened.*] Play, you harlot, play!

[*The woman begins strumming discordantly.*

INNKEEPER [*with a comical effort to compose himself*]. What . . . er . . . what . . . will you have wine, sir?

STRANGER [*at table centre*]. Of course, idiot. What else would I want? Bring me some wine. [*Takes out a silver coin from a pouch, hitherto concealed under his cloak, and rings it on the table.*] Bring me your best wine.

INNKEEPER [*electrified by the sight of the coin*]. Immediately, sir, immediately. [*Quickly fetches out a wineskin from beneath the counter, and pours out a measure.*] You shall have my best Greek wine, sir, special wine, sir, strong wine, sir. . . . Is it not, Giotto?

OLD MAN. Aye, sir, indeed, very strong. Just what I could do with for my very bad cough. [*Coughing.*

STRANGER. Serve him as well.

OLD MAN. Oh, thank you, your highness. [*Gets up and bows.*] You are a noble gentleman, sir. That's what I said as soon as I saw you, sir.

STRANGER [*glaring at him*]. Liar!

OLD MAN [*hastily sitting down again*]. Oh, no; oh, no.

STRANGER. Hurry with that wine.

INNKEEPER [*bringing two wine-cups*]. Coming, sir. Here you are, sir: the best wine in all Jerusalem. Sip it slowly, sir, to get the strength of it.

[*He takes wine-cup to the old man as the stranger gulps his wine.*]

STRANGER. Bah! You call that wine? Pig-wash!

INNKEEPER. Oh, no, your highness, it is very good wine, very good indeed.

WOMAN. Will you be wanting me any more, Jacob?

STRANGER. Sit down and play, woman. I like your melody. It soothes my nerves. [*Throws coin at her.*] There's for your music.

[*The innkeeper and the old man stare in astonishment at this further evidence of wealth.*]

WOMAN [*coming to the stranger*]. Oh, thank you, sir, thank you. Now I can pay my rent and my taxes and buy enough food for my little ones. You are a noble gentleman, sir, a very good gentleman, sir.

STRANGER. Why must women always prattle? I said play. Music, not talk.

WOMAN. Oh, yes, sir, yes.

[*Begins playing again, but the music is drowned by another fit of coughing by the old man.*]

STRANGER. Curse you! Can't you stop that death rattle? Here, give him more wine with syrups in it. And some for her too. [*Throws silver piece, which the innkeeper grabs expertly.*]

INNKEEPER. Your wish is my command, master.

[*Business: wine.*]

OLD MAN. It is very kind of you to pity an old man, noble sir. I am very thirsty this morning. I have walked far since daybreak. It is many furlongs to the Hill. . . .

STRANGER [*standing in a fury*]. The Hill! Curse you, muttering old fool! I don't want to hear about the Hill. Do you hear? Shut up!

OLD MAN. Why . . . yes . . . your highness.

STRANGER [*taking cup off counter and handing it to the old man*]. Here's your wine. Drink.

OLD MAN [*dazedly*]. Thank you, sir.

STRANGER [*to woman*]. And yours.

WOMAN [*coming across for the cup*]. Your very good health, sir. [*Drinks, sitting centre table.*]

OLD MAN. Your health, sir. [*Drinks.*]

[*The stranger takes wine for himself, hesitates, then moves to the window, back. He looks out on the scene. He appears strangely moved, and starts to bite his finger-nails till the blood comes. There is silence as the others look anxiously at him.*]

STRANGER [*suddenly turning to catch the stares*]. Well, are you all dumb? What's the matter with you? Talk, you fools, talk! And you, play. Let's have music, let's have anything, but don't stare at me like that—d'you understand, don't stare at me!

[*His eyes are wilder, his voice raised in a frenzy. He drinks his wine savagely.*]

INNKEEPER [*at a loss*]. Well . . . er . . . It's gone very warm, hasn't it [*mopping his brow*]?

OLD MAN. Yes, very warm.

INNKEEPER. Perhaps we shall have a storm.

OLD MAN. Yes, there is a storm brewing. I said to Palutto this morning up at the——

• [*The old man checks himself in time. There is an uncomfortable pause. The stranger is again staring out of the window. The woman's strumming is nervous and staccato.*]

INNKEEPER [*frantically, talking rather loudly*]. They tell me there has been much rioting in the city, sir.

[*The stranger appears not to hear.*]

OLD MAN. Yes. Palutto was saying. Many fights there have been. It's all on account of this carpenter fellow. Nothing but trouble ever since he came. [*Cackling in an effort to interest the stranger*] Fancy anybody riding into the city on an ass, and silly women throwing palm-leaves in front of him like he was somebody important. . . . You were there, weren't you, Gilda?

WOMAN [*stops playing*]. Yes.

OLD MAN. Well, tell the gentleman about it.

INNKEEPER. Yes, tell him, Gilda.

WOMAN. It was wonderful. Such beautiful eyes He had. Just like a mother's—clear and bright and kind, as if He understood everything. I'm sure He smiled at me as He passed.

INNKEEPER [*with loud scorn*]. Ogh! Smiled at you! That's funny! Him such a goody-goody, and you a bad woman like you are sometimes when you've got no money to pay your taxes. . . . This Jesus only bothered with them that goes to the Temple every Sabbath—

OLD MAN [*interrupting*]. But Palutto says it's the bad ones this Jesus took to. Palutto climbed up on a wall to see Him when He was curing a cripple, and he said Jesus looked at him, looked straight at him, and Palutto says he began to feel so queer he nearly fell off the wall. [*Cackling*] I told Palutto he's getting too old for climbing walls. That's what made him feel queer. Did you see him, highness?

[*The stranger has been sitting on the bench below the back window, his head buried in his hands.* He makes no reply.*]

Your highness?

STRANGER [*looks up. His face is drawn and haggard*]. Well?

OLD MAN. Did you see Him?

STRANGER. Who?

OLD MAN. The Man we speak about, the Man they call Jesus.

[The stranger jumps to his feet, in a fury. He comes towards the old man as if to strike him.]

STRANGER. Jesus! Don't speak that name. D'you hear? Don't mention it!

OLD MAN *[cowering]*. Don't shout at me, sir. You said talk, and when I talk you say shut up.

[The stranger recovers from his outburst and goes slowly back to the table centre, while the woman, afraid, gets up and goes back to the seat at the window left.]

INNKEEPER. Don't answer the gentleman back, Giotto. . . . Please excuse him, sir. He has no manners. He talks far too much. Shall I give him more wine, sir, to keep him quiet?

STRANGER *[brokenly]*. Yes . . . give him wine.

INNKEEPER. And some for you, sir?

STRANGER. Yes.

INNKEEPER. And for the . . . lady, sir?

STRANGER. Yes.

INNKEEPER. Very good, sir. *[Bustles to the counter.]*

[Pause. We hear the gurgling of wine, the old man coughing, a few uncertain notes on the harp.]

[The innkeeper brings three wine-cups on a tray, sets one down before the stranger, whose head is still bowed, then before the woman, and then the old man. The innkeeper goes back to the stranger, stands for a moment, then coughs politely to attract attention.]

. Excuse me, your highness.

[The stranger looks up. His hands are revealed. There is blood trickling down them from the fingers. The innkeeper stares stupidly.]

STRANGER [*furiously, hiding his hands under his cloak*]. What are you staring at, fool?

INNKEEPER. Are you hurt, sir? Your hands: there's blood on them.

STRANGER [*savagely*]. Well?

INNKEEPER. Nothing, sir, nothing. . . . Can I have my money, sir, for the wine?

STRANGER. You swindler, you heathen pig! Take your money! [*He flings a silver coin on the floor by the counter.*

INNKEEPER [*hastily retrieving the coin and polishing it before pocketing it*]. Thank you, sir, thank you . . .

[*Retreats behind counter mopping his brow.*

[*The stranger drinks his wine savagely in one draught.*

[*Catching the old man looking at him, he gets up and walks towards the old man's table.*

STRANGER. Why do you look at me like that?

OLD MAN [*scared*]. I wasn't looking at you, sir. Honest to God I wasn't.

STRANGER. You think I'm mad, don't you?

OLD MAN. Oh, no, sir, no, indeed.

STRANGER. You do. I can see it in your eyes. And yours. [*He turns suddenly to the woman.*] You both think I'm mad, don't you? [*Pause. Sits at the old man's table.*] Well, you're right . . . I am mad . . . I can hear voices in my head. I can see bright, clear eyes staring at me, following me. As I walk along the street people stare at me, point at me. . . . I was a good man once. [*Frantically*] Yes, I was, a good man. That's why He called me, and I left my wife and home and followed Him. . . . But that's a long time ago. . . . I'm not good any longer. I am unclean, filthy, an outcast . . . because I have done a terrible thing. . . . [*He gets up, turns, and goes towards the window back.*] Why did I do such a thing? Why did I listen to them? Oh, God, why did I

do it? It was their fault, not mine: they made me do it, I tell you, they made me do it! . . .

[*He falls, sobbing, on the bench.*

INNKEEPER [*alarmed: hesitantly to the stranger*]. Please, sir, is there anything I can do to help you?

[*The stranger makes no reply: he is sobbing bitterly.*

OLD MAN. Play some music, Gilda. The gentleman said it soothes his nerves.

INNKEEPER. Yes, yes, that's it, some music, Gilda.

[*Going across to the woman and urging her to play. As she plays he watches the stranger to see if he is pleased.*

[*The song has not gone very far when the door opens and a girl in her twenties appears. She is pretty in a vulgar way—unmistakably a woman-of-the-street.*

[*Catching sight of her, with great relief*] The heavens be praised! Look who's here, Giotto. It's Rachel.

[*The woman stops playing. Excitement. The innkeeper gives the girl a royal welcome. The stranger takes no notice.*

GIRL. Hello, Jacob, my old friend [*playfully embracing him*].

INNKEEPER. Welcome, Rachel, welcome. We thought you had gone to Damascus.

GIRL. What a place! No trade at all: it's worse than Jerusalem. How's business?

INNKEEPER. Bad, very bad!

OLD MAN. Hello, Rachel.

GIRL. Hello, Giotto, my cunning friend. Is your cough better?

OLD MAN. Oh, no, as bad as ever.

[*Coughing. The woman starts playing again.*

GIRL. For God's sake stop that mournful wail. Why do you let her play that stuff, Jacob?

INNKEEPER [*leading her down-stage, whispering*]. Shhhh! [*Pointing to the stranger*] My good friend likes it.

GIRL [*for the first time taking a good look at him*]. Ah, a stranger.

[*She goes across to the stranger. The innkeeper and the old man wait to see what will happen.*]

GIRL. Good day to you, stranger [*seductively*].

STRANGER [*looking up*]. What do you want?

GIRL. Why, nothing, dear. I just wanted to meet you and talk to you.

STRANGER. Shut up!

GIRL [*back to counter*]. Your friend isn't exactly sociable, Jacob.

INNKEEPER [*beckoning her out of earshot*]. He's a very strange man, Rachel. I think he's mad.

OLD MAN. Did he not say so himself?

INNKEEPER. But I don't care what he is—he's got plenty of money. See. [*Shows her one of the silver pieces.*] Silver. And he's got many more pieces. If you can entertain him there's money in it for you.

[*Winks. The stranger looks up at the group, then comes deliberately towards them.*]

STRANGER. What are you whispering about? It's about me, isn't it? [*Savagely*] I won't have it. Understand? I won't have you staring at me and whispering. You're like the people outside. They kept whispering, staring . . . Oh, God!

INNKEEPER. We meant no harm, sir. We were wondering how to entertain you, sir.

STRANGER [*tormented*]. Why can't you leave me alone? If I can't have peace I must go somewhere else. . . •

[*Turns.*]

INNKEEPER. Oh, no, sir, don't do that. Rachel will entertain you, sir, won't you, Rachel? [*Pushes her forward.*]

GIRL. Why don't you sit down, dear? See, your face is all sweat. Let me wipe it away for you. . . .

STRANGER [*furiously*]. Don't touch me—harlot!

GIRL. Don't call me that!

STRANGER. Harlot, I said. You are, aren't you?

[*He glares at her furiously. She sits, trembling, fascinated by the stare.*

[*He turns towards the steps, then stops and turns towards the innkeeper.*] Innkeeper!

INNKEEPER. Yes, sir?

STRANGER. Will you do me a favour?

INNKEEPER. My humble place is yours to command, excellency. Any thing you ask!

STRANGER [*towards him*]. Have you any rope?

INNKEEPER. Rope, sir?

STRANGER. Yes, rope, you fool! Are you deaf?

INNKEEPER. Well . . . I may have, sir . . . I think I have, sir. . . .

STRANGER. I'll pay you well.

INNKEEPER. Oh, yes, I'm sure I have, sir. How much will you be wanting, sir?

STRANGER. How much? I don't know . . . I don't know.

INNKEEPER. I'll bring you what I've got, sir, immediately, sir. Gilda, keep an eye on the wine for me.

[*The innkeeper goes out right. The woman crosses to the counter. The stranger stands where he is, half muttering to himself.*

GIRL. Why don't you sit down, dear? You look so ill.

STRANGER [*sitting on a stool the girl places for him*]. Yes. Thank you.

GIRL. Would you like me to play for you?

STRANGER. No.

GIRL. Or dance?

STRANGER. No.

GIRL [*smoothing his hair*]. Would you like to rest awhile? Jacob has a nice room upstairs. I can show you if you like.

STRANGER. For God's sake leave me alone! [*Throws silver coin to woman.*] Here, give her wine. Give everybody wine. [*Pleading*] And don't stare at me. I didn't mean to do what I did. Can't you understand? They made me do it. . . . Oh, God!

[The stranger buries his face in his hands, his whole body racked with sobbing. There is a moment's silence, then the door opens and a man appears—a rough, florid-faced Jew.]

MAN [*with gusto*]. Hello, everybody, hello, hello.

OLD MAN. Palutto!

MAN. In the flesh. [*Bowing, mock ceremony*] Palutto, the old nuisance, the man who sees all, hears all, and tells all. [*Coming in*] Why, if it isn't our little Rachel as beautiful as ever. What a joy to behold! [*Kisses her heartily.*] But what is this? [*Seeing wine-cups*] A celebration? Do I see wine for a thirsty throat? Giotto, you old rascal, have you come by some easy wealth without telling your very good friend Palutto?

OLD MAN. It's that kind gentleman's doing.

MAN [*turning to stranger*]. Well, well, well, is he so far gone in his cups that he cannot hold his head up?

OLD MAN. *Shhh!* He is sick, Palutto.

MAN. Oh! . . . What ails you, my good friend?

[The stranger looks up slowly. The man is shocked by the haggard face and wild eyes.]

Haven't I seen you before?

OLD MAN. No: he's a stranger in these parts, Palutto.

MAN. But I have seen him before. In God's name! Yes, I saw you this morning. You were the one up at the Hill, who . . .

STRANGER [*gripping him by the throat*]. Curse you! I

wasn't at the Hill. I wasn't, I tell you! . . . [*Recovering himself.*] Have some wine. . . . Here, everybody take your wine. [*He passes round the wine-cups.*]

MAN [*with forced heartiness*]. I am sorry I upset you, sir. It could not have been you I saw up at the Hill this morning. My eyesight isn't what it used to be. Let us all drink the health of this kind stranger. . . . Your very good health, sir.

[*All drink. The stranger sits at the centre table. The innkeeper returns with a coil of rope.*]

Bless my soul, what are you doing with that, Jacob? Are you at last going to rid the earth of so unpleasant a creature as yourself?

INNKEEPER. Will this be enough, sir?

STRANGER. Yes . . . Yes. Here.

[*Gives him two silver coins.*]

INNKEEPER. Oh, thank you, sir, thank you.

MAN. Did you see what I saw, or are my eyes again deceiving me? [*Over to stranger*] Excuse me, my friend, but that shrunken bit of hemp is not worth two silver pieces, surely?

STRANGER. No, you think not? . . . Do you know what I am going to do with this shrunken piece of hemp?

MAN. Tie your wife to a stake and whip some sense in her?

INNKEEPER. Hush, Palutto.

GIRL. Tell us, stranger, what are you going to do with it?

STRANGER [*pause: looks from one to the other, then speaks in a whisper*]. I'm going to hang myself.

MAN [*laughing discordantly*]. Ho, ho, ho, that's funny, that's dathned funny. . . .

[*Seeing the look on the stranger's face, he stops laughing abruptly.*]

STRANGER. Before I do let's drink and be merry. Come,

innkeeper, give us wine, give us your very best wine. Fill up the cups for everybody.

INNKEEPER. Certainly, sir, certainly. . . . Come, Gilda, help me do as the gentleman says.

[The woman and the innkeeper fill six wine-cups. The man and the old man are whispering together at the table down-stage right. The stranger is seated at the table up-stage left, examining the money left in his pouch. The girl goes over to the stranger.]

GIRL. You are a strange fellow. Can I not help you in any way? *[Caressing his hair]* I have a little house all to myself near the market-place. Would you like to come there and rest? *[No answer. She moves round the table.]* You look so tired: is there nothing I can do for you? Come, look at me, sir. I am pretty, am I not? *[Rests her face against his cheek.]* Will you not come home with me?

[The stranger looks at her, then slowly puts his arm round her shoulder, pulls her face down to his, and kisses her. The girl pulls herself away, and, with an expression of disgust, slowly backs towards the window. There is silence in the room as all watch her.]

STRANGER *[getting up]*. Well, what's wrong with you? Isn't that wine ready yet?

INNKEEPER. Yes, your highness. Serve the gentleman, Gilda.

[The woman takes wine to the three men. The innkeeper takes a cup over to the girl, keeping one for himself.]

STRANGER. Now I want you all to drink a toast with me. *[The girl and the innkeeper come forward to form a group near the counter.]* A toast to the devil, my friends: to the devil and all his kin. To thieves and robbers, to hypocrites and usurers, to the Pharisees and their pious frauds, to harlots

and adulterers, a toast to all traitors everywhere. Drink to them, and may their souls rot in hell!

[Savagely the stranger drinks. The others look at him with bewilderment, but none drink. The stranger smashes his wine-cup on the floor, turns to the table, picks up the rope, looks at it a moment, then makes for the steps.]

INNKEEPER *[as the stranger goes up the steps]*. Sir? *[He turns.]* What about my money, sir, for the wine?

STRANGER. Money! You heathen pig! Can you think of nothing but money? Here *[emptying his pouch]*, take the other twenty-three pieces, and may your soul rot in hell as mine will!

[The stranger throws the handful of silver coins into the room. All pounce on the coins eagerly.]

Yes, that's right, you fools. Fight for it. Grovel for it. *[They pause and look at him.]* Can you see what money has done for me? Thirty pieces of silver, that was the bargain, and I sold my soul for it. . . . Oh, God, why should it have been *me*?

[The stranger stumbles out into the roadway, hands to his throat. The others look towards the doorway a moment, uncertain what to do, then suddenly begin squabbling for the money.]

INNKEEPER. The money is all mine, don't forget.

GIRL. What I have got I am keeping. Trade has been very bad lately.

WOMAN. I need money for my little ones. *[Pushing the innkeeper away]* Pig, why should it be yours?

INNKEEPER *[sobbing in temper]*. The money's mine, I tell you. Give it to me. It's mine, it's mine. . . .

[They are all arguing heatedly as the curtain falls.]

When the Old Cock Crows

By Joe Corrie

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CHARACTERS

ELIZA BRIDWELL

GEORGE HAZELWOOD

JOE HAZELWOOD

ALICE BATES

DAISY GREEN

*Applications regarding amateur performances of this play should
be addressed to Messrs Samuel French, Ltd, 26 Southampton
Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, or 25 West 45th Street, New
York*

When the Old Cock Crows

The scene is the kitchen of Windyridge farm. It is a fairly large room with a flagged floor and plain whitened walls. The table, uncovered, is in the centre of the floor. Two wooden forms, one at the back and one at the front, provide seating accommodation at meal-times. At the left end there is a wooden armchair. To the front of the left wall is a fairly large and old type of fire. A wooden armchair stands here too. At the back of the left wall there is a door opening to the pantry.

Against the back wall stands the dresser with its array of willow-pattern type of dishes and other odds and ends. To the left of it there is a small window. To the right of it a grandfather clock.

In the centre of the right wall there is a bigger window, in front of which is a seat. At the back of the right wall is the door that leads to the outside and other parts of the farmhouse. The action takes place on an early evening in springtime.

When the curtain rises Daisy Green sits on the window seat at right reading a paper-covered copy of "Maria Marten, or the Murder in the Red Barn." Daisy is a girl of seventeen years, in her working-garb, and not as tidy as she might be. She is too deeply engrossed to hear the entry of George Hazelwood. George is a man of sixty years, in his working-clothes, dirty boots and all, and carrying his coat over his arm. His shirt-sleeves are well rolled up, as if he had put in a good day's work. He hasn't shaved for a day or two, and he looks grubby. But this doesn't stop him from fancying himself a bit, and the first thing he does on entering is to take a good look at himself in the mirror which stands on the dresser. He runs his fingers through his tousled hair and squares his shoulders. He turns.

GEORGE. No wonder young girls go wrong. Ha! [He

tosses his coat down carelessly on the armchair at the table. Then he looks at Daisy, who is now sobbing.] What's the matter with you?

DAISY [*looking up at George very sadly*]. Oh, George, he's gone and murdered her. *Impressed*

GEORGE [*puzzled*]. Who's gone and murdered who?

DAISY. William Corder. ~~Enticed~~ *Impressed* her to the Red Barn, he did, ~~made her put on trousers too~~, and killed her in cold blood. Now he's diggin' a grave for her to bury her in. Oh, poor Maria Marten! [*She puts the book on the seat.*] I . . . I can't read any more, it's too heart-breaking.

[*She weeps bitterly, and buries her head in her hands. This annoys George.*]

GEORGE. But it's only a story. Don't be silly!

DAISY [*looking at him*]. But it's a true story, George.

GEORGE. Yes, true a hundred years since. [*He goes a step nearer to her.*] I saw that story acted in a wooden theatre when I was a boy. Saw him go to the scaffold and be hanged by the neck till he was properly dead, I did. [*Sinisterly*] And heard him give his last horrible gurgle too.

DAISY [*a bit relieved*]. Oh, was he hanged after all, George?

GEORGE. By the neck till he was as dead as mutton. [*He crosses over to the fire and turns.*] Dead as mutton.

DAISY. Hanging's too good for his kind. What they want is a real good whipping. [*Again in distress*] If she hadn't been so young and innocent and pure, George.

GEORGE. What's that? Who was?

DAISY. Poor Maria Marten.

GEORGE [*with disgust*]. Bah! They put anything in ~~the~~ story-books. All women that are murdered in ~~them~~ are young, and beautiful, and pure—little angels, all of them. But if you ask me there are few women who don't get what they deserve in the long run—even if they *do* get murdered.

DAISY [*innocently*]. Has Eliza been putting ye in your place again, George?

[*George was half-way down to sit in the chair, but he springs up again quickly.*]

GEORGE. What's that! *Her* put me in *my* place! There's no woman living could ever put George Hazelwood in his place, especially a crusty, half-withered old housekeeper like Eliza Bridwell. Not on your life!

DAISY. Why does she hate ye so much, George? You ain't so very bad.

[*George steps over to her briskly.*]

GEORGE. Because I won't let myself get under her thumb, that's why. She is the kind that wants to boss everybody. But no woman will ever boss me—never!

[*He goes to the dresser and looks at himself in the mirror again.*]

DAISY. Why does she want to boss everybody, George?

[*George turns.*]

GEORGE. Because she has never got a man to herself, that's why. Them kind always gets old and crusty when they find themselves on the shelf—beside the pickles.

DAISY. Well, why don't ye marry her yourself, George, and give her something to be happy over?

GEORGE. What! Marry that old mangold-wurzel! [*Patting his head*] It's a head I have on here, not a turmit. [*He goes to the fire and sits.*] I hate her worse than hemlock. And listen to me, Daisy Green, if she's goin' to continue interferin' with me there'll be a book like that written about me and her—only I'll see that she goes in such a way that I won't get hanged for her.

DAISY [*going across to George and speaking softly*]. How'd ye get rid of her, George?

GEORGE. I'm keepin' that to myself in case it does happen.

DAISY. I won't tell a soul, George.

GEORGE. I trust lawyers, but not women.

[Daisy, a bit disappointed, sits on the form at front of the table.]

DAISY. It's strange that Alice, the new girl, gets on so uncommon well with Eliza, George.

GEORGE. The poor girl don't know her yet. . . . She's a good-looker for them parts, ain't she, and smart too. Mm! Wish I'd been a bit younger, with the likes of her knocking around.

DAISY. She's takin' a fondness for Joe, don't ye think?

GEORGE. Joe ain't a lady's man.

DAISY. But you was in your young day, George.

[George rises, squares his shoulders, and puts his thumbs in his belt.]

GEORGE. The things that have happened with me and the girls in my time . . . I could write a book about it, and what a book it would be! What a book!

DAISY. It don't seem to run in the blood with your nephew, George?

GEORGE. There's always been two kinds of Hazelwoods—them that could never look at a woman, and them that could look at nothing else. I'm the one kind, and my nephew Joe is the other.

[Daisy sighs, rises, and goes over to the window at right.]

DAISY. I've been in love with Joe this long time, but no matter what I do to please him, he won't melt.

GEORGE *[after looking Daisy up and down]*. Joe's one of the particular Hazelwoods, I reckon.

DAISY *[dreamily]*. Once Joe took a bit of chaff out of my eye—once. And when he put his arm round me to help steady his hand I . . . Oh, it was lovely, George, just beautiful.

[Daisy sits as if she would swoon with the thought of it.]

GEORGE. You read too many of them silly love-stories, my girl. Your head's softened with romance.

[George goes back-stage and has another look at himself.]

[Turning] For my age I think I'm the handsomest man in this whole parish, no doubt about it, the handsomest. . . .

[The door at right back is opened, and Eliza enters.]

Eliza is a woman of fifty-five years, stoutish, but neatly dressed for her work, and looking very capable. She glances at George scornfully, then turns her attention towards Daisy, who is still dreaming.

ELIZA. So this is where ye are? And at your story-books again. *[She grabs the book from the seat.]* The moment ye get my back turned ye steal away to read your murders in the red barns.

[George, with a faint smile on his face, is now leaning on the dresser watching Eliza.]

GEORGE. There was only one red barn and only one murder that I know of.

[Eliza turns her head sharply and looks at George.]

ELIZA. And there's a lot ye *don't* know of—enough to fill a good big book, George Hazelwood. *[George just smiles scornfully. Eliza turns and speaks to Daisy again, who has risen to her feet, a bit afraid of the wrath to come.]* Ain't there no faggots to break for the morning? Ain't there no chickens to lock up for the night? Or d'ye think there ain't to be no day to-morrow, eh? . . . Master and mistress go off for the evening, and ye think ye should have a night off too. Get out and get busy, I tell ye—ye lazy slut.

DAISY. I'm going, Eliza—going!

• • • *[Daisy hurries out. Eliza turns over a few pages of the book quickly, then stuffs it in her pocket.]*

ELIZA *[as if to herself]*. Why master puts up with *that* girl, I don't know.

GEORGE. There'll be *lots* of things ye don't know, I suppose—or ain't there?

[Eliza just looks at him. Then she sees his coat on the chair.]

ELIZA. Is this your coat here?

GEORGE *[still leaning on dresser]*. It is.

ELIZA. And is that the proper place for it?

GEORGE. It is.

ELIZA. In your opinion.

GEORGE. And the opinion of a good and independent man, Eliza. And don't forget it.

ELIZA. I'm responsible for the housekeeping of this farm, George Hazelwood, and that coat should be hanging on a nail.

GEORGE. Like some women I know.

[George laughs at his own joke and comes forward to the left end of the table.]

ELIZA *[after looking at him for a second or two]*. Are you in one of your nasty moods again?

GEORGE. My moods are my own, and I can do what I like with them, can't I?

[He turns the chair round and sits with his arms leaning over the back of it, facing Eliza with a broad smile on his face.]

ELIZA. Why master allows his servants to go about like scarecrows is more than I can understand.

[She goes to right and looks out of the window.]

GEORGE. Master knows he's got a damned good man, and that's all *he* cares about. *[Eliza turns.]*

ELIZA. Well, I ain't going to have coats on chairs when there's nails and hooks on doors.

[She goes to the chair as if to take it away. George jumps.]

GEORGE. That coat is lying on that chair till I get a call to put it somewhere else.

ELIZA. I ain't having it on that chair, I tell ye.

GEORGE. All right, it can lie somewhere else.

[He crosses, lifts the coat, and tosses it on the floor at right front. Eliza looks at the coat, then she looks at George, finally resting her eyes on his boots.]

ELIZA. And look at them boots on your feet. *[George looks down and smiles, proud that they are so dirty.]* What's that scraper out there at the door for?

GEORGE. That scraper is the finest outside ornament in this whole county, Eliza, and I wouldn't dirty it for the world.

ELIZA. Meaning ye won't take them boots out and get the dirt off them?

GEORGE. They're on my feet now, and there they stay till I take them off to go to bed.

ELIZA *[going across to the fire to put some sticks on]*. Very well, George Hazelwood. I'll get it settled once and for all when mistress comes home to-night, who's to be in charge of this house when she's away.

GEORGE. Ye can stick your head up that chimney, Eliza, where it would look better.

[Eliza turns and looks at him, shaking her head sorrowfully.]

ELIZA. George, I'm disappointed in ye—sadly disappointed.

GEORGE. If you'd save your disappointment for others ye might get rid of a lot of your own nastiness.

ELIZA. If ye were to smarten yourself up a bit folk might come to like ye better.

GEORGE. I don't need you to tell me what I might be if I wanted to. If I was to set my mind on it I could bring such reformation to myself that I'd be mistaken for one of the try.

ELIZA. Then why don't ye?

GEORGE. Well, I'll tell ye why. I don't want half the women of this place running after me—including yourself. [*This gives Eliza cause for a good hearty laugh.*] Now, don't ye laugh too loud, Eliza. I may take the notion some day to let ye see what I could be like, and ye might have a remorse of conscience.

ELIZA. Don't ye be afraid, George; that laugh will never trouble me. [*The door at right back opens, and Joe Hazelwood enters. Joe is a fellow of nineteen years, dressed quite smartly, and wearing a collar and tie.*] Well, Joe, you *do* look smart in your new suit and your collar and tie. I was a bit afraid that ye might grow like your uncle—when ye got old.

GEORGE. Who's old?

ELIZA. Well, I don't see many cockerel feathers on ye. [*Joe has come forward to sit on the table at right end. Eliza pats him on the back.*] That's how to grow into a real man, Joe. Keep yourself clean and tidy, and put your money in your pocket instead of into the till at the Fur and Feather.

GEORGE. Who spends all his money in the Fur and Feather?

ELIZA. If ye only spent your own money nobody would mind so much. [*Going between Joe and George*] When am I going to get back that five shillings I gave ye—before I knew ye?

GEORGE. There'll be a day of reckoning, Eliza, when the cows come home.

[*He turns and goes to look out of the window at right.*]

ELIZA [*to Joe*]. Better to lose five shillin's, Joe, than be eternally tormented. [*Joe just nods his head.*] Are ye going into the village?

JOE [*a man of few words*]. No.

ELIZA. Ye just dressed yourself up to look smart?

JOE. Yes.

[*George sits in the window seat looking at the two*]

them. Eliza goes to the other end of the table and sits.

ELIZA. You'll get somewhere a bit higher in the world than the Fur and Feather, Joe.

GEORGE. Joe. [*Joe looks at him.*] The man that ain't fond of his glass of cider either turns sour or goes wrong in the head. [*Rises and pats his chest.*] Cider is the lubrication of some of the finest specimens of mankind in this world. Look at me!

ELIZA. And are you one of the fine specimens?

GEORGE. Just about one of the finest.

[*Eliza rises, laughing.*

ELIZA. Joe. Take a good look at your uncle, and keep in mind of the picture. The remembrance of it'll help to keep ye on the straight path.

[*Door at right back opens, and Alice enters. She is a nice-looking girl of nineteen years, and dressed smartly. Joe becomes nervous.*

ALICE [*to Eliza*]. I'm going out for a walk before dark, Eliza. Is that all right with ye?

ELIZA. Maybe Joe'll go out with ye for company, Alice.

[*This doesn't make Joe any happier. Alice looks at George.*

Oh, don't go by what ye see sitting there, my girl. Joe's a different kind of Hazelwood. [*To George*] Women running after you!

[*She goes off at right back laughing heartily. Alice looks at George, then at Joe.*

ALICE. Did she say women, Joe?

JOE. Yes.

[*Alice is puzzled. Joe shuffles along the table till he is at the other end of it.*

ALICE [*to George*]. What did she mean about women, George?

GEORGE. Eliza Bridwell is in love with me so much that my rejection of her advances has turned her blood into vinegar.

[He now proceeds to fill his pipe. Alice sits at the right end of the table.]

ALICE. What is this love, George?—you that knows all about it.

[Alice looks at Joe, but Joe isn't looking her way. She then looks at George.]

GEORGE. Love is the helplessness of a woman in the presence of a man that—that knows a thing or two.

ALICE. Meaning what, George?

GEORGE. How to deal with them.

ALICE. And what is the way to deal with them, George?

GEORGE. It's given to very few men to know that.

[Again Alice looks at Joe, but he is just tapping his knees with his fingers.]

ALICE. But you know, George?

GEORGE. Some day I'll write a book on it—and what a book!

ALICE *[turning to Joe]*. Do you know what this love is, Joe?

[George doesn't give Joe time to answer, even if he wanted to.]

GEORGE. If he doesn't he should. How to deal with women's been in the Hazelwood blood since the days of the flood. Treat them rough, Joe, that's the first thing to keep in mind. And the rougher the better.

[Joe slips down from the table and looks at George in a most annoyed manner.]

ALICE. I like men that are kind and gentle, Joe.

GEORGE. You've just got to like what ye get, my girl. Men ain't goin' to be kind and gentle, like sheep, just because women want 'em that way. *[He rises and addresses*

Joe.] The rougher ye treat them, my lad, the better they'll like ye. Remember that.

JOE [*nearly as angry as he can be*]. When are you going to talk sense!

[*Alice rises. This is a different Joe from what she has known in her brief stay at the farm.*]

GEORGE. Oh, don't believe me if ye don't want to, Joe, but you'll suffer for it. [*George goes to the dresser to get a match, then he crosses to the fire, Joe following him with his eyes all the time, and Alice watching Joe.*] Listen to me, Joe.

JOE [*going a step nearer to George*]. Why should I listen to you, or anybody else?

ALICE. I like men that don't listen to everybody—especially old men.

GEORGE. It ain't years that make a man old, my girl. Use your eyes.

JOE. No, it's just big ideas getting smaller—in my opinion.

ALICE. I like men that have opinions, Joe.

GEORGE. There's times I feel like getting up at the dawn, climbing up on a haystack, and crowing like a cockerel.

ALICE. Oh, cockerel, are ye, George? That's why you're so fond of the Fur and Feather?

JOE [*to George*]. You've got no answer to that.

GEORGE. Haven't I? Can ye lend me two shillings?

JOE. For cider?

GEORGE. Are ye afraid that ye won't get paid back?

JOE. I'm still waiting on too many of your cows coming home, Uncle George.

ALICE. I like men that are careful with their own money.

GEORGE. Yes, you're like all the women, my girl, ye like everything in a man that isn't in him, and never will be for you. [*To Joe*] When I was a young man I met scores of her kind, Joe, scores of them.

JOE. And what did ye do with them?

GEORGE. Played with them as a cat plays with a mouse, and let them just break their hearts over me. [*George goes back to the seat at the window. Again Joe follows him with his eyes. With a chuckle.*] The dreams I could have if I just had the time.

[*He now lights his pipe. Joe looks at him scornfully and then dismisses him. He sits on the edge of the form at the front of the table and looks into the fire. Alice goes behind the table and looks at him.*

ALICE. Are ye going out somewhere, Joe?

JOE. No.

ALICE. You've dressed yourself up.

JOE. Yes. [*George looks at Joe.*

ALICE. Ye just dressed yourself to sit inside?

JOE. ^{Yes.} [*Alice goes towards the fire and looks at Joe.*

ALICE. Your ~~tie~~ ain't on right straight, Joe. [*And to Joe's embarrassment she goes to him. He rises. She adjusts his tie. For a moment we think—so does George, for he rises expectantly—that he is going to put his arm round Alice, but his courage fails him. George sits in disgust.*] That's it right now, Joe, and real smart too.

JOE. Thank ye.

GEORGE. Thank the Lord. [*Joe turns quickly.*

JOE. What for?

GEORGE. Helping ye to say two words together.

[*Joe strides across to George in no uncertain manner, to Alice's apprehension and George's surprise.*

JOE [*very close to George*]. What did ye say there?

GEORGE. With some men, Joe, it's a gradual process.

JOE. It won't be a gradual progress if I slap ye on the old face.

[*Joe looks like doing it too. Alice hurries over to them, but doesn't make any attempt to hold Joe from George. George holds up his hand.*

GEORGE. Easy, Joe, easy. I was only expressing an honest opinion.

JOE. Well, ye can express it to the pigs out there who'll understand ye. You ain't wanted in here, see!

GEORGE. But ye can't do anything without my moral support, Joe.

JOE. And what should I *want* to do?

GEORGE. I thought . . .

JOE [*interrupting*]. Well, don't. If all you have in your head is women, remember that it's the farthest-away thought from *my* mind.

[This is a great disappointment to Alice. She makes to go out.]

ALICE. The Hazelwoods are queer—both bloods of them.

[She goes out, shutting the door angrily.]

JOE. Now, that's all your fault.

GEORGE. What's my fault?

JOE. Her going out like that.

GEORGE. You want to walk her out, do ye?

JOE [*sadly*]. Of course I do.

GEORGE. Then why don't ye?

JOE. It ain't every man that can be free with women.

GEORGE. If you'd seen me in my young day, my lad. I just had to—

JOE. I'm tired hearin' about you and your young days. Them days are past and gone.

GEORGE. But the skilfulness is still there.

JOE [*turning from him and leaving him*]. I don't believe a word ye say. [*Joe sits rather dejectedly in the chair at the fire.*] Talk, talk, talk, and nothing but empty boasting!

[George goes nearer to him.]

GEORGE. If I had a woman of my own age in here just now—*any* woman—I could teach ye a trick or two on how to do it.

[Joe looks up at him.]

JOE. Ye don't have to search far for that. There's Eliza in here, ain't there, and you're dead scared of her—dead scared.

GEORGE [*with a little laugh*]. Scared of *her*! I could turn her head and make her fall for me as easy as drinking cider on a hot summer day. [Joe rises.]

JOE. Tell ye what I'll do. I'll bet ye five pounds that if ye tried anything on with her you'd just get your face slapped for your pains.

GEORGE [*enthusiastically*]. Is that a challenge?

JOE. It is.

GEORGE. Did ye say five pounds?

JOE. I did.

GEORGE. I've a good mind to take on your bet.

JOE [*smiling*]. Yes, ye've a good mind to, but ye don't have the courage. [George goes back to the window.]

GEORGE. Five pounds. What *wouldn't* I do for five pounds?

JOE. That's *one* thing ye wouldn't try, anyway. [*Sure that George will hedge*] Come on, Uncle George. You that has played with women as cats play with mice shouldn't be afraid to make a bit of love to old Eliza. Guess she'd be easy compared with some of them ye've had through your hands. [George looks at Joe.] Five pounds, Uncle George, five crisp pound notes. [*He takes an old note-case from his inside pocket and shows him some notes.*] Five of these, Uncle George, and all to give me a lesson in courting a woman. Eh! [George's eyes bulge at the sight of the money.] [*Still tantalizing*] Think of the many happy hours ye could have in the Fur and Feather with that money, Uncle George. Think of it—five pounds for cider!

[*Slight pause while Joe's grin gets broader.*]

GEORGE [*suddenly and to Joe's astonishment*]. I'll take that bet on.

JOE [*astonished*]. Ye will?

GEORGE. I will! [*Joe puts the note-case back into his pocket.*]

JOE. But—but there'll have to be conditions.

[*George going to Joe.*]

GEORGE. Then make them.

JOE. Eh—you've got to get her promise to marry ye through the courting.

[*Joe smiles, thinking this will put George off.*]

GEORGE. If I don't ye can keep your five pounds.

JOE. Ye—ye think ye could!

GEORGE. I'm sure I *will*.

JOE. But how am I to know about it? . . . And what good'll the courting do if I don't see it done?

GEORGE. Ye can *hear* it done.

JOE. How?

GEORGE. Ye can go into that pantry there and listen.

JOE. You ain't serious, Uncle George?

GEORGE. Ain't I? Wave them five pound notes in front of my face again, and I'll—I'll even get her to go down on her old knees and kiss my boots.

JOE. I was only joking, Uncle George.

GEORGE. No, you wasn't. That bet is on, my lad, and I'm gettin' that five pounds or—

[*We hear Eliza off shouting.*]

ELIZA. Dais-ee! . . . Dais-ee! [*George grabs hold of Joe.*]

GEORGE. Come on, into the pantry! [*Joe struggles.*] Into the pantry, I tell ye! I'm making that old crab-apple promise to marry me or . . .

[*He uses all his force and gets Joe into the pantry at left back. When he gets the door shut he turns the key in the lock and puts it into his pocket. Then he goes over to the window and stands looking out, keeping an eye on Eliza's entrance. She looks at the fire.*]

ELIZA. ~~Ye might have been keeping an eye on that fire.~~

[She goes to the fire, lifts the bellows, and blows the wood into a flame. All the time George is watching her discreetly, wondering just how to begin his advances. He looks out of the window, adopting a lonely attitude. Eliza rises and looks at him for a moment.]

Ain't there no cider in the Fur and Feather to-night?

GEORGE *[still looking through the window]*. Cider ain't everything in a man's life.

ELIZA. What's that?

[George turns.]

GEORGE. Cider ain't everything in a man's life. I know it isn't.

[He turns his head from her again. Eliza cannot understand this attitude. She sits in the chair at the left end of the table and watches him.]

ELIZA. Something the matter with your stomach?

[George turns and looks at her for a moment before speaking.]

GEORGE. Eliza . . . you said something to me this evening that has hurt me.

ELIZA. I didn't think ye could be hurt—'specially by a woman.

GEORGE. 'Tis true what ye said, Eliza, all the same—that I ain't the man I *might* be.

ELIZA *[curtly]*. Pity somebody hadn't told ye that years ago—and you'd heeded the words.

[George goes to the chair at the right end of the table and leans over it to speak to her.]

GEORGE. But it ain't too late to mend. It's *never* too late to mend.

ELIZA. Thinking of going to church on Sunday, are ye?

GEORGE *[becoming huffy]*. Oh, if you're going to make a fool of me, Eliza, I'll say no more.

[*He looks out of the window again. Eliza is more perplexed than ever.*]

ELIZA. Are ye annoyed just because I said a few words to ye for your own benefit? [George turns.]

GEORGE. It's the first time in my life that the words of *any* woman has sunk so deeply in my heart.

ELIZA. That's strange, surely?

GEORGE. It is, mighty strange. But miracles *do* happen.

ELIZA. But I only spoke the truth. Ye *would* be a real smart man if ye'd just change over.

GEORGE. And that's what I'm going to do, Eliza.

ELIZA. Surely not because I said——

GEORGE [*interrupting her*]. Because *you* said it, Eliza.

[*Eliza rises. George goes to the other end of the table and looks at her.*]

Eliza, my dear, I've been mighty nasty with ye ever since ye came to Windyridge.

ELIZA. I never could understand why.

GEORGE. And it's only this evening that I have come to understand why, Eliza.

ELIZA. Well?

GEORGE. It's hard for me to give ye the truth, Eliza, but I'll do my best. [*He sits slowly in the chair. Eliza sits slowly too.*] (There's a contrariness in some men that doesn't have any common sense in it, Eliza, and they don't have the courage to fight against it.)

ELIZA. Against what?

GEORGE. Well . . . ye won't laugh this time, Eliza?

ELIZA. Why should I?

GEORGE. Thank ye. . . . The first time I saw ye, Eliza, ~~and~~ looked into them starry eyes of yours, I . . . I knew that the only way to prevent me falling stark, staring mad in love with ye was to—to be as nasty with ye as I could.

ELIZA [*greatly astonished*]. George Hazelwood!

GEORGE. I was in love with ye, Eliza dear, from the tip of my toes to the crown of my head. [*Eliza rises and turns her back to him to hide her blushes from him. He goes nearer to her.*] And now, now, Eliza, ye see a man in the throes of a great reformation—a complete reformation.

[*He looks towards the pantry and smiles.*]

ELIZA [*still looking from him*]. I don't know what to say to ye—honest, I don't.

GEORGE [*still speaking to the pantry*]. Just let me do the speaking, Eliza, and save your own sweet breath. [*He goes to her and puts his hands on her shoulder, but speaks rather loud so that he will be heard by Joe.*] Won't ye turn and look at me, Eliza? I know you're shy, but I—I understand. [*Eliza turns slowly. George takes hold of her hands.*] Oh, why is it that I have never held them beautiful hands in mine before, Eliza—as white and cool as water-lilies? [*He now strokes her hair.*] And why have I never stroked your beautiful head of hair . . . and praised them starry eyes—and them dewy lips? Oh, Eliza, you are beautiful—beautiful beyond compare.

ELIZA [*greatly excited*]. How—how did ye learn to talk like that?

GEORGE [*louder than he should talk, for Joe's benefit*]. Them words were never learned, my love; they are inspired. It's my heart that's only a gramophone record, and my lips are playing it over to ye.

[*He looks towards the pantry rather proudly. Eliza would like to draw her hands away, but she is rather reluctant.*]

ELIZA. I am surprised—George.

GEORGE. You'll be more surprised before I'm finished, Eliza, just you wait. . . . Eliza, we're both in the evening of our days. I may be rough, but I'm strong, and—

ELIZA. But you ain't as rough as not be finer, George.

GEORGE. Don't ye hear a gentleness in my voice already, my sweetheart?

ELIZA [*lowering her head*]. I do, George.

GEORGE. I thought ye would. And when I get shaved, and put on my best suit . . . will it please ye, Eliza?

ELIZA. Well . . . if you're going to do it for me, George.

GEORGE. Oh, Eliza, them hands are too precious to be working about farms. Let it be my passion now to work for ye—to toil my fingers to the bone for ye.

ELIZA. It *does* get tiring after so long, George.

GEORGE [*loud enough for Joe to hear*]. Let me put my strong arms around your slender waist and tell ye my dreams of the future—my blossom. . . . I can see a little white cottage dazzling in the sunlight. There are roses round the door—red roses for love, Eliza, and the white ones for devotion. . . .

ELIZA. Oh, George!

GEORGE. And there I can see ye standing at the door, waiting on me coming home from the Fur and—I mean, home from my honest day's work in the fields—with my heart afire for your embraces, my lily, and ready to kiss ye like this!

[*He takes a firm hold of her and kisses her real and good.*]

ELIZA [*stepping back from him*]. Oh, George, you've gone and . . . and kissed me!

GEORGE. And d'ye know why, Eliza?

ELIZA. No.

GEORGE. It's because I'm going to ask ye a question.

ELIZA. Yes?

GEORGE. Ye promise that ye won't faint on my hands, Eliza?

ELIZA. I . . . I'll try hard not to, George.

[*The door at right back is opened, and Daisy enters, unseen by George and Eliza. She just stands*

wondering what is happening that the two of them seem so near and friendly to each other.

GEORGE. If ye promise to marry me, Eliza, I promise by all that's sacred to be faithful to ye till my dying day.

[Daisy utters a gasp of astonishment.]

DAISY *[loud in her condemnation]*. George Hazelwood! *[George and Eliza turn quickly.]* How can ye say such words to a poor innocent woman?

GEORGE. Get out of here till I'm finished, I tell ye!

DAISY. You heartless old man!

GEORGE *[to Eliza]*. Do ye promise, Eliza? Say yes, quickly. *[George is desperate to get her answer.]*

ELIZA. I do.

GEORGE. Hooray! I've won! *[He goes to the pantry door and shouts.]* Ye heard that, Joe! I've got her promise. I want my five pounds.

JOE. Let me out, will ye; I'm suffocating in here!

GEORGE. You'll get out when ye say that I've won the bet. *[This makes Eliza cock her ears.]*

JOE. Let me out, and we'll discuss it.

GEORGE. It don't need any discussing. You bet me five pounds that I wouldn't get her to promise to marry me, and she has. Daisy here is a witness to that. Ain't ye, Daisy?

DAISY *[to Eliza]*. What did I tell ye, Eliza? He didn't mean it.

ELIZA *[rolling up her sleeves]*. Oh, he didn't, didn't he? *[She goes to George and faces him.]* You made a promise to marry me, George Hazelwood. *[George laughs heartily.]*

GEORGE. And did ye think I was in earnest, ye old toad-in-the-hole? Ho! ho! ho! What d'ye take me for?

[Eliza gets hold of him by the braces.]

ELIZA. You promised to marry me, and you're keeping to your word. Have ye the key of that pantry door?

GEORGE. I have, and it's staying in my pocket till I'm sure of my five pounds.

ELIZA [*to Daisy*]. Daisy, there's a key that fits the pantry in the scullery. Get it and let Joe out till we get this settled.

[*Daisy hurries off. George struggles.*]

GEORGE. Let me go, will ye!

ELIZA. I'll let ye go when I get a call to do it, George Hazelwood. There's no man trying to be smart at *my* expense. [*Daisy returns.*] Open the door, Daisy.

[*When Daisy is opening the door Alice enters in a hurry too.*]

GEORGE [*still struggling*]. Are ye going to let me go!

ELIZA [*taking a firmer grip*]. No. And I'm never going to let ye go again, never while I live! [*Joe comes from the pantry.*] Joe, you heard his promise to marry me?

JOE. Every word, Eliza.

ELIZA. You'll be a witness to that?

JOE [*smiling*]. I will.

GEORGE. You—you will!

JOE. The truth is the truth, ain't it?

GEORGE. And what about my five pounds?

JOE. You'll get it when the cows come home, Uncle George.

[*George struggles again to get away from Eliza's hold.*]

ELIZA. You'll be a witness too, Daisy?

DAISY. I heard every word he said, Eliza—the wicked old man!

ALICE [*going to Joe*]. I'll be a witness too, though I didn't hear anything. [*Eliza now lets George free.*]

ELIZA. Now, George Hazelwood, ye know that a ~~man's~~ **word** must be his bond with master. Liars and hypocrites he won't tolerate in his service. So ye can just sit over there at the window till he comes home, then we'll fix the day of the wedding.

GEORGE. I'll do no such thing, I tell ye . . .

ELIZA. It's either that ye marry me, George, or ye go away from the farm. And there's only one place for ye if ye chose that—the workhouse.

GEORGE [*to Joe*]. You—you traitor!

[*Joe just smiles and puts his arm confidently round Alice.*]

ALICE. Oh, Joe, ye have your arm round me!

JOE. That's nothing, my blossom. Just you wait till ye hear all the nice things I'm going to say to ye. Uncle George gave me the finest lesson in courting that ever a young man got in his life. Come out with me, somewhere in the quietness of the evening, and . . . [*He takes her in his arms suddenly and kisses her.*] There! And that's a very mild beginning, my beautiful water-lily.

ALICE. Oh, Joe!

[*And arm in arm, and nestling close to him and looking into his eyes, she goes off with Joe. Daisy watches them go, then bursts into tears.*]

DAISY. Oh, Joe—Joe! Ye've broken my heart!

[*She goes off slowly. Eliza looks at George.*]

ELIZA. Will ye go and change your clothes and shave yourself, George, so that we can tell master the good news whenever he comes home?

GEORGE. Good news! . . . I tell ye I'll never . . . never . . . never!

ELIZA. That's it, George, three times for luck.

² ~~JOE~~ To think that my own flesh and blood should betray me like that. I'll kill him for that, I tell ye, kill him!

ELIZA. You'll live to thank the day that he did betray ye, George.

GEORGE. I will? How?

ELIZA. I'll make ye into the finest man in this shire, George—sober, industrious, and respectable.

GEORGE. Ye know that I don't love ye one little bit.

